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Allegiances

Allegiances

ThunderClan

Leader
Bramblestar-dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Deputy
Squirrelflight-dark ginger she-cat with green eyes

Medicine Cat
Leafpool-light brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Jayfeather (gray tabby tom with blind blue eyes)

Warriors (toms and she-cats without kits)
Graystripe-long-haired gray tom
Dustpelt-dark brown tabby tom
Sandstorm-pale ginger she-cat with green eyes
Brackenfur-golden brown tabby tom (father to Lilykit, a dark tabby she-cat with white patches, and Seedkit, a very pale ginger she-cat)
Cloudtail-long-haired white tom with blue eyes
Millie-striped gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes
Thornclaw-golden brown tabby tom
Spiderleg-black tom with brown underbelly and amber eyes
Birchfall-light brown tabby tom
Whitewing-white she-cat with green eyes
Berrynose-cream-colored tom
Hazeltail-small gray-and-white she-cat
Mousewhisker-gray-and-white tom
Poppyfrost-tortoiseshell she-cat
Cinderheart-gray tabby she-cat
Lionblaze-golden tabby tom with amber eyes
Foxleap-reddish tabby tom
Apprentice, Cherrypaw
Icecloud-white she-cat
Toadstep-black-and-white tom

Rosepetal-dark cream she-cat
Apprentice, Molepaw
Briarlight-dark brown she-cat
Blossomfall-tortoiseshell and white she-cat
Bumblestripe-very pale gray tom with black stripes
Dovewing-pale gray she-cat with blue eyes
Ivypool-silver-and-white tabby she-cat with dark blue eyes

Apprentices (more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)
Cherrypaw-ginger she-cat
Molepaw-brown-and-cream tom

Queens (she-cats expecting or nursing kits)
Daisy-cream long-furred cat from the horseplace
Brightheart-white she-cat with ginger patches (mother to Snowkit, a white tom with amber eyes, Amberkit, a gray she-cat with white paws, a white muzzle, a white right ear, and amber eyes, and Dewkit, a gray tom with amber eyes)

Elders (former warriors and queens, now retired)
Purdy-plump tabby former loner with a gray muzzle

ShadowClan

Leader
Blackstar-large white tom with jet-black paws

Deputy
Rowanclaw-ginger tom

Medicine Cat
Littlecloud-very small tabby tom

Warriors
Oakfur-small brown tom
Smokefoot-black tom
Toadfoot-dark brown tom
Applefur-mottled brown she-cat
Crowfrost-black-and-white tom
Ratscar-brown tom with long scar across his back

Apprentice, Stoatpaw (ginger tom)
Snowbird-pure-white she-cat
Tawnypelt-tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes
Olivenose-tortoiseshell she-cat
Owlclaw-light brown tabby tom
Shrewfoot-gray she-cat with black feet
Scorchfur-dark gray tom
Tigerheart-dark brown tabby tom
Dawnpelt-cream-furred she-cat
Pinenose-black she-cat
Ferretclaw-cream-and-gray tom
Starlingwing-ginger tom

Queens
Kinkfur-tabby she-cat, with long fur that sticks out at all angles (mother to Dewkit, a gray she-cat, Sparrowkit, a brown tabby tom, and Mistkit, a pale gray she-cat)
Ivytail-black, white, and tortoiseshell she-cat

Elders
Cedarheart-dark gray tom
Tallpoppy-long-legged light brown tabby she-cat
Snaketail-dark brown tom with tabby-striped tail
Whitewater-white she-cat with long fur, blind in one eye

WindClan

Leader
Onestar-brown tabby tom

Deputy
Ashfoot-gray she-cat

Medicine Cat
Kestrelflight-mottled gray tom

Warriors
Crowfeather-dark gray tom
Owlwhisker-light brown tabby tom
Whitetail-small white she-cat
Nightcloud-black she-cat

Apprentice, Crouchpaw (black tom)
Gorsetail-very pale gray-and-white tom with blue eyes
Weaselfur-ginger tom with white paws
Harespring-brown-and-white tom
Leaftail-dark tabby tom, amber eyes
Emberfoot-gray tom with two dark paws
Heathertail-light brown tabby she-cat with blue eyes
Sedgewhisker-light brown tabby she-cat
Swallowtail-dark gray she-cat
Sunstrike-tortoiseshell she-cat with large white mark on her forehead
Whiskernose-light brown tom
Furzepelt-gray-and-white she-cat
Boulderfur-large pale gray tom

Apprentices
Larkpaw-gray she-cat

Elders
Webfoot-dark gray tabby tom
Tornear-tabby tom

RiverClan

Leader
Mistystar-gray she-cat with blue eyes

Deputy
Reedwhisker-black tom

Medicine Cat
Mothwing-dappled golden she-cat
Apprentice, Willowshine (gray tabby she-cat)

Warriors
Graymist-pale gray tabby she-cat
Mintfur-light gray tabby tom
Icewing-white she-cat with blue eyes
Minnowtail-dark gray she-cat
Pebblefoot-mottled gray tom
Mallowtail-light brown tabby tom

Robinwing-tortoiseshell-and-white tom
Beetlewhisker-brown-and-white tabby tom
Petalfur-gray-and-white she-cat
Grasspelt-light brown tom
Rushtail-light brown tabby tom
Apprentice, Heronpaw (brown tabby tom)
Troutstream-pale gray tabby she-cat
Mossyfoot-brown-and-white she-cat
Hollowflight-dark brown tabby tom

Queens
Duskfur-brown tabby she-cat (mother to Podkit, a tom, and Curlkit, a she-cat)
Mosspelt-tortoiseshell she-cat with blue eyes

Elders
Dapplenose-mottled gray she-cat
Pouncetail-ginger-and-white tom

Cats Outside the Clans
Curl-light brown tabby tom with strange curled ears
Blaze-big muscular orange tom
Nickel-small gray tabby tom
Penny-wiry golden-brown tabby she-cat

Other Animals
Midnight-a star-gazing badger who lives by the sea

Chapter One

"Fire! Wake up, fire!" I opened my eyes to see a gray tabby face peering down at me, green eyes like mine wild with terror. "Didn't you hear me? Get up!" I scramble to my feet and try to look around in all directions at once.
"Where? I don't see it?" I look at my brother and realize his whiskers are twitching. He's amused.

"I gotcha good, didn't I?"

My ears burn at this. "That not funny!" I swipe a paw at him. "What if there really is a fire next time?"

He turned around and stalked away. "Then it's your problem if you don't listen," he called over his shoulder. "I'm going to go get *my* breakfast. Maybe a finch or two."

"Wait, Tabby!" His gray tail had already vanished behind a waving fond of bracken. As I took a step, a fat drop of water landed on my nose. I looked up to see a green-gray sky of churning clouds, and another drop of rain plodded onto my face. "Great," I muttered under my breath.

I had picked up the trail of a vole and was stalking the timid creature when Tabby appeared out of the underbrush, the same vole I was stalking in his teeth. "Fome to ve barn wif me," he mumbled through his freshly caught prey. I nodded accepting this as an apology, I trotted after him to the barn, our home.

Just then, all the memories of my kitten hood and how Scoop, our mother, used to love the barn. She would sleep in the pokey hay that the horses ate and doze in the sunshine. I was still very young when the wildfire swept through the forest. Scoop had been teaching his sister, Scarlett, how to hunt when it first started. They never made it back to the barn.

Luckily, his father with his long and fiery legs had somehow

managed to outrun it with only a singed tail. Whenever he or Tabby brought it up, Blaze changed the subject quickly. All he said was that she was a creme colored cat with darker colors on her muzzle, tail, and paws. His father was a sturdy but quick legged tom with a fiery orange long haired coat.
"Do you want to share or not?" The growl jerked me out of my memories.

I twitched my ear. "Sure. Let's eat, I'm starving!" Tabby and I sat across from each other, gulping down the small animal. I looked around the old and decaying barn house as it creaked in the increasing gusts of wind. "I hope this old shack doesn't collapse in on us!" I meow, trying to squeeze a chuckle out of my brother. It doesn't work.

"Is that you two down there?" I look up to see my father Blaze jumping down from one of the hay bales. His high-pitched mew doesn't match his big and sturdy build. "That storm up there sure is putting up some racket, it sure is hard to sleep. Wanna go and check it out?" I nod and get to my paws, then give my long and thick fur a short grooming.

"Let's go!" I trot over to the big wooden doors of the barn, Tabby and Blaze following behind me. They are slightly ajar, showing the rainy world outside. It's chaos. To the right, a small play set for young humans is being threatened to tumble over and become airborne. In front of the barn, the dark green leaves of the oak and birch trees wave wildly in the strong gusts of wind. A flash lights up the darkened late afternoon sky and a bright streak of light speeds from cloud to tree. The oak bursts into orange and red flames, but is smothered by the hissing rain. A loud crack of thunder follows. To my left, I see the town. I hear faint human screams and shouts, then realize that two shapes are sprinting toward the barn.

"Who's that?" Tabby asks in a low voice. I shrug. When they arrive panting, we welcome them into the barn. One is a silver tom with some darker flecks, and the other is a small wiry golden-brown she-cat.

"I'm Nickel, and this is Penny" pants the silver one. "We have come to warn you."

I frown. "What is there to warn us about?" *We obviously know about the storm...*

Penny blinked her emerald eyes with fear. "If you hear the loud wailing, run for cover in a rabbit hole or somewhere underground. It's safest there."

"Safest from what?" Tabby growled. He narrowed his eyes in suspicion. I bump him. "Don't be too angry at them. They've obviously run a long way to warn us," I meowed fiercely at him.

"The Great Wind." In mid-sentence, a deafening wailing started up, echoing around from the town. Both Nickel and Penny's eyes widened to full moons and the two small and worry cats sprinted out of the barn into the storm.

"You heard them, go and find a rabbit burrow to hide in!" Blaze warned us.

Tabby's eyes narrowed. "What if they were lying?"

"Better safe than sorry." Blaze hustled the two small cats out of the small barn and we sprinted across the clearing. Finally, I made it to the tree line and looked back to see the green-tinted clouds swirling like a circle in an odd fashion. Then, right before my eyes, a strange cone stretched slowly down from the upper clouds, and reached the earth below. It looked like a fantasy dream. This must be the Great Wind Nickel was talking about. It looked as if it was consuming the whole town, all only maybe a mile away. Suddenly, a big object the size of a large dog hurtled across the clearing toward Blaze, and shocking me back to reality. It was headed toward the Great Wind.

"Blaze watch out!" I screeched at him, desperate for him to move. I'm to far away to help, and by the time I get over to him, it would be too late. Tabby looked over and saw the flying object and shoved his father out of the way. In the process of this, the debris smashed into Tabby instead of Blaze and I could hear bone crunching. The force of the impact and the added wind made him airborne. He vanished into the trees on the left, to where the Great Wind was. "No! Tabby!" I couldn't stand losing him, I just couldn't. All I could think about was the look of fear and determination on his face as he

sacrificed his life for Blaze's.

It was as if I was blind to everything except the one bush where Tabby's gray and white tabby marked shape had disappeared. I didn't even notice part of the play set coming at me at the speed of a monster. Realizing I didn't want to have the same fate as my brother, I crouched as low as my legs would allow me to, and the thing whizzed over head, not a mouse length above. Trembling and weak from the scare, I instinctively loosened my grip on the rain-soaked grass, and suddenly felt myself being lifted into the air by a strong gust of wind.

"No! I won't lose you too!" I looked down to see Blaze leap up. I reached down to the orange cat to get a grip and hooked my claws with his. My father yanked me down to the ground, but it wasn't enough. I unsheathed my claws to try to get a grip on the slippery mud, but it was no use. I was getting sucked towards the Great Wind. My paws left the ground as I saw Blaze run for cover in the trees, thinking that I was trailing behind him. Perhaps it was better this way. He wouldn't have to see me die like he did Tabby. It wouldn't do any good anyways to call for him to help, because the wind was getting stronger the closer I came to the cone-shaped cloud. I dared to look down at the sight made me queasy. I was at least double the height of the houses in the Town.

Then I felt myself dropping, faster and faster. *The Great Wind is dying down,* I guessed. I felt a strange calm, as if I wasn't really heading for the hard and unforgiving land below me. I shot one last glance at the Great Wind and saw it was now no more than a wisp, and it looked more like the smoke the came out of the humans' dens than a great and sucking monster, destroying everything in its path. I closed my eyes and tried not to think what would happen next.

Then I hit.

Chapter Two

Though it felt as though I was hitting solid ground, I immediately knew that it was water, not grass I had landed in. Cold water shocked me and chilled me to the bone. The river I had happened to land in was swelled to the brim, and almost overflowing. I looked around to see is there was anything I could grab onto to help my body float, but it was all just churning green-gray water. In the distance, I could see trees, where the Great Wind was. I started to swim that direction.

I found how hard it was to swim. It was not an easy task to complete for a normal cat, but one with a thick pelt? My back leg started to hurt after only a few moments of swimming, and realized I had to grab onto something. Just when I was about to go under, I saw a small piece of driftwood getting thrown around in the rapids. I paddled and kicked out to reach it. When I grabbed it with my outstretched claws, I saw it was a smooth piece of a branch. The odd thing about it was that it had markings, made from some cat's claws, and the end looked as if it had been broken. I didn't spend time thinking about it too much. All I cared was that I had something to hold onto.

I don't know how much time had passed when I realized the river that had been in a full out flood, had quieted down. It was also getting smaller and smaller as the heartbeats went by. I let go of my stick, thinking I could swim to the sandy shore, but underestimated the power of the river. The moment my claws left the broken stick was the moment I was dragged under to the murky depths of the fast-flowing river.

So, I asked my self*, was this going to be my death, or did life have something else in store for me?* I didn't try to fight the current this time. I knew I would be no match for its strength. Suddenly, pain ran up my shoulder and through my spine as I hit a boulder. This forced the last bubbles from my mouth, and soon the deep depths of unconsciousness took over me.

I woke with a start. My shoulder was throbbing, and my leg hurt. I tried to remember where I was and what I was doing here, but when I reached deep into my memories, but it was all fuzzy, with brief flashes of light and sound. That's when I realized I couldn't even remember my name.

Lifting my head, I saw that I was on a sandy stream bed, facing the river. The sky was still covered with gray clouds, and tiny rain drops dripped from the sky. This brought back a memory, but though I knew it was there, it seemed too far away to see. In front of me, the river split into two, then disappeared behind a fold of green rolling hills. I smelled a wide expanse of water to the right, but that was fairly far from me. I shakily got to my paws and saw that a mush of dark green leaves had been spread on my wounds: my shoulder, my head, and my leg. Again, the sight of these injuries brought the memory; it seemed closer than before, but not enough.

I turned my head and saw behind me that a forest stretched beyond. I thought I saw a bush move, but I smelled no cat. "Hello?" My voice sounded hoarse as if it had not been used in many days. There came a muffled reply. Slowly, I crept forward and stopped a tail-length away from the bush. A calico pelt flickered in the darkness, then was gone as quickly as it came. This time I gave chase. I smelled a scent and recognized it as a tom, but it didn't give itself away again. I was pretty sure that this was the cat who helped me.

Suddenly, my paws hit hard dirt, not soft and soothing undergrowth. It looked sort of like a human thunderpath, with the exception of dirt instead of hard rock. I easily bounded over it in two leaps. Finally I stopped, out of breath and panting. I sniffed the air, hoping to find any kind of familiar scent in this strange, strange forest. The strong scent of cat overlaid the also strong scent of water. Maybe this cat had some kind of camp or shelter where they stayed.

Slowly, I crept towards the scent, instinctively dropping into a crouch, keeping all of my weight on my haunches. I took one step forward, then a screech split the air. It was the sound of a cat wailing in terror. I now sprinted, determined to help this cat in need.

I cam upon a thorn barrier, and just beyond that, a deep hole of stone. It looked as if it had been carved out by humans, then abandoned. The cat scent was strongest here, but on top of the cat scent was also the scent of fear. It was almost overwhelming. Other scents such as blood also infected the air. My eyes widened as I realized there must have been a huge battle taking place.

I fought my way through the thorn barrier, and came out into the clearing before me. Tons of cats were crowded around something. I craned my neck to see, and spotted a huge muscular tabby tom with amber eyes. His claws were extended fully out revealing glittering thorn sharp needles he was facing a bright orange tom, with broad shoulders. Even in the dim light his pelt shine like fire. The massive tabby leaped at the other cat. The crowded cats gasped as he grabbed his throat, attempting to kill the flame-colored cat. One of the cats in the crowd - a she-cat with a pale ginger coat and green eyes - jumped forward as if to help him. Another cat pulled her back.

The orange tom pulled his throat out of the other cat's mighty grasp, and I expected blood to pour out on the ground. It never came. The tabby, it seemed, had a loose grip on his throat and had only managed to rip out a chunk of fur. I breathed a sigh of relief, but somehow somewhere in my body I knew that only one cat would walk out of this battle. The flame colored cat now lunged for the dark brown tabby and got a grip on his throat this time. Blood welled out, and surrounded his body. The cat let go and turned to the crowd. They cheered in delight. To my surprise, the body of the big cat shimmered, then disappeared, only leaving the blood-stained grass behind.

Just then, a bolt of light shot down from the sky, and struck the tree next to the winning cat. An incredibly loud crack of thunder followed. The tree exploded into crackling, hungry flames. Choking smoke rose from the it. I stared hard into the already-dying flames and saw to my dismay, the cat lying ominously still. I took a paw step forward to see if he was alright when I stepped on a dry leaf. The closest cat, a seeming duplicate of the dark tabby whipped around and stared at me. "Who are you?" He asked accusingly.

Suddenly, I remembered my name as if some cat had just told me.

"My name is Curl."

A/N Please note that the parts and the places of where he ends up are in the real Warriors books. If you read the end of The Last Hope, you will find this actually happened. Except Curl walking in of course.

Chapter Three

"So let me get this straight," I asked Brambleclaw. "You had some dream about a cat from this *StarClan* or whatever you called it, and they told you what?" Me and Brambleclaw, the new leader of this group named ThunderClan, were discussing some distant dream he had a moon or so ago. Apparently, by the way he acted, it was pretty important. There were three other clans in the forest: ShadowClan, WindClan, and StreamClan, or something to that effect. They all hunted in their own territory. Kittens and older cats were cared for by their warriors and the apprentices. They were all healed by the Clan healer, or the medicine cat, which also sometimes had an apprentice. There was a fifth and special Clan called StarClan, where all the dead cats go, and on occasions like this, give out mysterious prophecies. The warrior code told of all this and more, which helped all the cats of the Clans be loyal and fair. Battles were fought over food and shelter, and the only time they met in peace was at the full moon, on the gathering island. Brambleclaw said the Clans once lived in another forest, but he wasn't going to explain that to me right now. What he was going to explain to me was that there was just a Great Battle, where the Clans, including dead Clan members, who somehow battled against real flesh-and-bone cats, fought against the Dark Forest, where the bad cats go. They had somehow managed to train cats in their own dreams and tried to make them turn against their own Clans. I had arrived through the tunnel into the camp, the heart of ThunderClan, just as it ended by the great leader Firestar killing the evil Tigerstar. Firestar, sad as it was, was killed by lightning, after his Clan name, ThunderClan.

Or something like that.

Even though I didn't really think of all this "important", Brambleclaw insisted I knew it was, or else the Clan would not accept me.

Right now, I was in the leaders' den discussing the prophecy

Brambleclaw received. "On this occasion, I had not told Firestar, who was the previous leader of Thunderclan before he died, that I had had a dream. Rarely do non-medicine cats receive dreams or prophecies from StarClan."

I thought about this for a while. "So what was this dream from StarClan about?"

A yowl sounded behind me.

"Sorry I have got to go and help the clan recover. Stay here and rest," Brambleclaw glanced down at my wrapped paw. "And go and see the medicine cat Jayfeather, he is that blue-gray tabby," He pointed with his tail to a blue tabby weaving among the injured cats. Brambleclaw gave me a shrug and pelted away, leaving me alone.

I sighed. "Well, I'd better go and see this medicine cat." I padded into the crowded clearing.

So it turns out that this Healer cat turns out to be blind. It really creeped me outs when I first saw him.

After a long and awkward silence, I slowly meowed, "Umm.. So you are a medicine cat...?" I gulped as his sightless blue eyes studied me.

Jayfeather didn't answer.

I figured I was being accepted, being a non-clan cat and all because the clan still seems to be getting over the death of this 'Firestar' character (these cats seem pretty sensitive to my type). Brambleclaw seemed fairly nice, so I padded over to him. "I'll be leaving now I suppose." I meowed slowly.

"Why don't you stay the night? I don't want you wandering over any other clan borders."

"Why not?"

"ThunderClan is the only clan that will take in rogues or kittypets for a few nights."

"What is a kittypet or a rogue?"

"Go to Jayfeather's den and get some sleep." Brambleclaw seemed like he wouldn't argue. I didn't protest, but I got the creeps when I thought about sleeping in the same room as that medicine cat. But my paws felt like they were going to drop off.

As I entered the Healer cat's den it was empty. *Probably healing some of those cats.* All of the cats he had met seemed very tired or gloomy. As my eyes adjusted to the gloomy light, I saw a little patch of moss that Jayfeather had made me sit down in. Many other injured cats were dozing on the moss beds too. A big flurry of scents hit me. The bed of moss was nice, I thought. I circled around many times, then finally let the massive black paw of sleep grab me and pull me under.

I woke to see dawn light filtering through the medicine cat's den, and Jayfeather muttering under his breath while mixing his herbs. Most of the cats around me were still snoring loudly, but a couple were awake. Creeping a little closer, I tried to make out what the blind cat was saying.

"...stupid prophecies always come at the worst times..." He stopped mixing and meowed loudly, "I know you're there Curl; just because I'm blind doesn't mean I'm stupid." I ducked my head in embarrassment. I crawled a little closer to him.

"So what's it like? Being blind, I mean."

Jayfeather didn't answer my question immediately, but queried, "Brambleclaw told you about the prophecy, didn't he?" A tricky switch of subjects.

I hesitated. "He told me about it, but not what it said." Suddenly Jayfeather looked up at me, his blind and sightless blue eyes staring straight into mine. "Then it is not time yet." He told me. "Brambleclaw will tell you when the time is right." I backed out of the den, still shivering from the sightless cat. Something about him...

"Hey! You over there!" I turned to see a white she-cat with orange

patches. I shied away at the sight of her face. One side of it was completely torn away, revealing soft pink flesh. No eye was to be found. First the creepy blind medicine cat, the a one-sided faced she-cat? What kind of Clan was this? But the cat looked sympathetic, and meowed "Oh, sorry, my friend and I were mauled by a pack of huge and giant bloodthirsty dogs but they're not here anymore. My name is Brightheart. What's yours?"

"Curl," I told her slowly.

Her eyes lit up in amusement as she stared at my curled ears. "And I see why they named you that! Did anyone else in your family have those ears?"

By now, I was starting to recover from the initial shock and answered her question. "Yes, my brother had them, but not my sister. She. . . . She died in a fire. With my mother." I lowered my head in grief, and Brightheart did the same.

Brightheart still looked curious. "We don't get your type of visitors usually. What happened to your brother and father? I thought that they would be with you." She narrowed her eyes. "Or did they. . . ."

"Yes," I meowed. "They died. . . . Well let's just say it was a bit windy when they died."

By now, a small crowd of cats had gathered around me.

"Where are you from?"

"What is your name?"

"What Clan are you from?"

I tried to answer their questions, but it was starting to overwhelm me. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join here beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!" The words of Brambleclaw sent the rest of ThunderClan flowing out of their dens, abandoning their hard work on the rebuild of the camp. Once all the cats had settled below the Highledge, which was a ledge that jutted out from the leaders' den, Brambleclaw began to speak.

"As you know, last night there was a great battle between the Dark Forest and the Clans. The Clans, we won!" His words were greeted by cheers of happiness and victory. "But that is the end of the good news. The Dark Forest has left devastating effects on all the Clans and they may come back again. To prevent this, we must now be prepared for battle at all times, day and night. Jayfeather," Brambleclaw whipped his dark head toward the crowd and his eyes focused on a cat.

"Yes?"

"I know you won't like it Jayfeather, but you will need to take on an apprentice. We will need all the help we can get from the medicine cats." I peered over the cats to see Jayfeather nodding his head, eyes narrowed in concentration. "I will be going to the Moonpool to receive my nine lives tonight, with Squirrelflight and Lionblaze." The two cats nodded in agreement.

"One last thing," Brambleclaw meowed. "A loner has strayed into our territory, and we have taken him in. He will be staying in my den until I decide if he can join the Clan. That will be all up to you though," he added looking at me. "We will need all the help we can, so I won't turn down the opportunity for more warriors. I would like to now speak with Curl in my den privately please." Brambleclaw stalked towards his den. I followed.

"Curl, I need to tell you what the prophecy said, whether you think it's true or not. Thunderstar, the founder of ThunderClan, told me, '*Battles will rage, cats will die, but in the end curled silence will rise.* I think that means. . . . I think he means that you will have to save the Clans.

Chapter Four

A/N Before you start to read his chapter, I want to thank all of you guys who helped make this book great. That includes commenters, voters, followers, and even the people who just read this. When I'm writing this, Curled Silence has 78 reads, but when *you're* reading this, I hope it has close to 100. Thank you everyone who has helped get this book so far! Now on with the story!

For a second, I didn't move. *Save the Clans? "*I - I think you have the wrong cat," I mewed hastily and started backing away, out of his den. Having the weight of saving the Clans was too much weight for me to bear.

Brambleclaw pulled himself to his paws, and stretched to full height. Suddenly, I'm didn't feel so old and wise, but more like a kitten next to the broad-shouldered leader. "I am the leader of ThunderClan, and if I feel it is best for you, you *will* stay in ThunderClan." He added with more sympathy, "I know you're young, but if I let you go wandering off somewhere, you might stray into another Clan's territory. They would for sure kill you on the spot." He started to pad out of the den and meowed over his shoulder to me, "Come with me out to the forest, I shall test your skills to see if you must go through training as an apprentice before you become a warrior."

I tagged along behind the striped tabby tom, out of his den and onto Highledge. He led me down the rocks and into the clearing. It was still littered with fur tufts and broken twigs and undergrowth and the scent of blood and fear still lingered clearly. All around the clearing, cats were repairing things around the clearing or patching up a tunnel that lead out to the forest. Jayfeather was just returning with a bundle of leaves and flowers in his jaws. Brightheart, the cat I had met earlier was dragging a long bramble across the clearing to the warriors' den. Squirrelflight, the newly named deputy, was keeping watch over a couple of apprentices who were fixing up

their own dens.

A couple brambles snagged at my long pelt as we passed through the tunnel. When I got through it, sunlight shown through the browning and yellowing leaves on the canopy of trees above my head.

A brown vole scurried in front of my tabby paws. By instinct, my fore-paw flashed out at the little creature. My claw sank deep into its neck, and it let out a little squeak before lying still. Bright red welled out around my claws. *I should give this to the clan for taking me in for a bit.*

"Nice*!* You have impressive instincts, Curl! Where are you from?"

I shrugged. I wasn't sure whether I should be trusting these clan cats. I picked the vile up and offered it to Brambleclaw. "For your ThunderClan."

"Bury it here, so foxes or badgers don't eat it up." He showed me how to dig a hole and kick dirt over it, and come back for it later.

Brambleclaw led me through the supposed heart of ThunderClan territory. Rain patterned lightly on the forest floor, and thunder rolled quietly off on the horizon. Weak sunlight filtered through the clouds and landed on Brambleclaw's tabby pelt, slicked down by rain. My paws began to ache yet again and Brambleclaw's pace never seemed to falter, silently padding on. Finally, after what seemed forever, we came to a giant tree. The highest branches seemed to reach the dark thunderous clouds, and the nearest branch to the ground was several tail-lengths above either of our heads.

I gasped.

"The Sky Oak," Brambleclaw breathed.

Brambleclaw turned around toward me. His Amber eyes gleamed in the weak light. "Climb as high as you can."

My heart skipped a beat. "What?! That's impossible, what do you think I am, a squirrel?"

Brambleclaw chuckled a bit. "I am testing you on your tree-climbing abilities. If you don't want to, fine."

I knew though what kind of test this really was. Bravery. "What if I fall?"

"Don't,"

I padded up to the ancient oak. The bark was rough, easy to claw onto. I stuck my claw in. It held. My back claws latched on, and I heaved my weight off the ground. Slowly but steadily, I clawed myself up the trunk of the tree. The first branch was very high, and as I reached it, I desperately held on to it. It swayed under my weight, but held strong.

"It is *amazing* up here!" I yowled over the treetops.

"You are doing better than I had expected! Keep going!"

My confidence vanished, looking up at how much farther I had to climb. *Eight times the height I just climbed, easyily.*

My confidence may have vanished into thin air, but my determination still burned strong as a flame inside me. Now though, it was easier since branches weaved through each other although I had to test the strength of every brach and twig. Greenleaf had shed most of the browning leaves from the oak tree. I managed a glance down at the ever-shrinking earth below. I had to grip on to the branch even harder as to not fall, as the tiny world beneath my paws began to spin. I closed my eyes. When I opened them, the spinning had stopped and I let out a sigh.

It began to get harder as I climbed higher, the branches got thinner and more spaced apart. One time, I almost slipped on a dry but thick branch. The branch tumbled down and down, through the tree until it hit the forest floor. Brambleclaw was a little ant down there... way down there.

Soon, I could see far around everywhere. The thunder clouds had rolled away, a lake reflected the blue and bright sky. Next to ThunderClan were pine forests and swamplands. On the other side

were rolling hills, going on and on. And all the way across the lake were many rivers that ran from the lake and on. It was amazing, being so high and seeing *everything.*

A wind began to blow, and I held on tighter to my unstable branch. Yet again, the tiny world beneath me began to spin, and I closed my eyes. Although this time I wasn't as lucky. When I opened them again, everything was still spinning. The tree was still swaying in the wind. My stomach did a couple flips and I instinctively my loosened my grip. Beneath me I heard a loud *CRACK* and I found myself falling, into the blackness of unconsciousness. My body whipped the twigs and broke through some other branches. I could see myself tumbling through the branches. Once or twice, I got slowed by a harder branch, but I always kept tumbling off of it. The ground grew and grew before me. I could see the shape of Brambleclaw, his pelt ruffled and yowling. Soon I could see even the fear reflecting off of his amber eyes. I wondered if this was the same strange calmness the Tabby had felt when he had been thrown off the ground at the Great Wind. Or what Scoop, his mother, had felt when she was stranded in that burning barn. The last thing I remember before I hit the forest floor is the last conversation me and Brambleclaw had had before I climbed the Sky Oak.

"*What if I fall?"*

"Don't."

Chapter Five

A/N Hey guys! Sorry for another A/N but I need to tell you who are reading this that I will be gone for the three days after this chapter is posted, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. This will not be every week, but just the days after I post this chapter. I will give you this chapter to keep you busy while I'm gone, but it might be a bit shorter than usual. *Gasp*! A switch in POV!

I looked up at the towering Sky Oak and saw Curl's small tabby body about halfway up. "Curl!" I yelled up at him. "That's good enough, you can come down now!" I waited for the loner's shape to stop and start to retreat down the tree, but it didn't happen. He just kept on climbing, higher and higher. I started to panic. Only the most brave apprentice had climbed that high. "Curl!" My voice must have been lost in the wind again, seeing that he still didn't stop his climb.

It was a moment before a realized that I could no longer see him, the small amount of leaves that remained on the tree had covered him from my sight. "Curl!" I screeched. He had to get down *now* or he would fall his death. Just when I had made up my mind to come up and get him by climbing, I heard a screech of pure terror. I craned my head up to see a shape descending the tree, but it was going much too fast to be climbing down, branch by branch. It was falling. Curl looked limp, letting the branches whip his pelt, and didn't even make a sound when his body smashed into a thick and sturdy branch. He teetered on the edge of it, then slipped off and continued his fall.

The whole episode from the start of the fall to where he would hit the ground was probably about ten seconds, with the branches in the way. He would not survive the fall. *Thump*. I ran over to the body of the small cat and saw that his eyes were glazed over. A small stream of blood was trickling out of his mouth. I knew he was dead, but I couldn't help whispering, "Curl?" And to no surprise, he didn't answer.

For awhile, I just sat beside his body and mourned. It was all my fault he was dead, I was the one testing him. I was the one who told him to climb the Sky Oak. Why did I tell him to do that? How will the prophecy live on, now that he's dead?

Slowly, as if trying not to wake a sleeping kit, I padded over to small clearing and dug a shallow hole in the ground beneath a tree. I then dragged Curl's young body into the hole and re buried it. Then I padded back to my Clan.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join here beneath Highrock for a Clan meeting!" My calls that echoed around the stone hollow brought my Clan into the clearing. I waited for ThunderClan to settle into the clearing before speaking. "Cats of ThunderClan, the loner we had been sheltering last night has ran back to its home, away from the Clans." Cats below me grunted in relief; I suspected they didn't like feeding extra mouths as much as I did.

"I shall go to the Moonpool tonight. Lionblaze. Squirrelflight, go and get traveling herbs from Jayfeather. Meet me by the thorn barrier afterward. You are dismissed." I leaped down from Highledge, not sure if I should be excited over my receiving my nine lives or mourning over Curl's death.

Just then, Bumblestripe yowled from the nursery

..>..

"What are their names?" I asked curiously.

"Well this is Stormkit," Dovewing pointed to a light gray tabby with blue eyes, just like Bumblestripe, but more muscular. "and this is Birdkit," she pointed to a light brown tabby she-cat, with green eyes. "Then there is Hollykit," Hollykit was a darkish silver tabby, with green eyes. She had unusual short legs. Dovewing nudged another kit, "And finally Curlkit, named after his strange curled ears." Curlkit was a longhaired dark gray tabby, with curled ears. *Just like Curl!* I wanted to yowl this to the whole clan, but I kept my mouth shut.

"They came early, way too early. Birdkit, the weakest may have been affected by this, and may not survive." Jayfeather meowed. But I wasn't listening. *The prophecy will live on, maybe. Has StarClan come and given life to another warrior? Just like Cinderheart?*

"Brambleclaw, are you alright?"

Bumblestripe's meow jerked him out of his thoughts. "Yes, fine. Those are nice names too." I meowed quickly.

"Thanks,"

Brambleclaw padded out into the clearing and yet again leaped up onto Highrock. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join here beneath Highrock for a clan meeting!" I yowled.

I heard a couple grunts and comments, but eventually everyone joined the meeting.
"As you might know, Dovewing has had her kits!" Cheers rose up from below me. "Their names are Hollykit, Birdkit, Stormkit, and Curlkit." The clan began to chant the names of the newly born kits. "Tonight, I will be traveling to the Moonpool, and I have decided that Graystripe shall take charge until I return." I hopped down from Highledge and gathered Lionblaze and Squirrelflight with me. *The prophecy, it can still happen,* I thought in my head. It felt as ough I could do anything!

I turned to see Lionblaze and my deputy ready, and meowed firmly, "Let's go."

Chapter Six

"Hollykit, you're such a slow slug!" I looked over to see my sister's small legs pumping as fast as she could. We were racing across the nursery, seeing who could get to the entrance first. I had already won, Stormkit came in second, but didn't whine about that. He was very calm about everything. Birdkit had just finished, her brown pelt fluffed up with annoyance. Hollykit was just now finishing, and I saw her eyes blazing.

"I am *not*!"

"Are too!"

"Woah, what's going on here?" My mother padded in, a gray mouse in her jaws. Her green eyes were glittering with amusement. "I was gone for a heartbeat, and I come in to find you two fighting." Dovewing carried the prey over to Daisy, who was taking a nap in the dappled sunshine. "I'm sorry, Daisy, did they wake you?" The cream colored she-cat lifted her head.

"No, no, they were just fine. I just love having new kits in the nursery, it hasn't felt right since Seedpaw and Lilypaw left the nursery." She looked back up at Dovewing. "Thanks for the mouse, I was getting awfully hungry."

My mother turned to look at us. "Why don't you four go and play outside?" I looked at Stormkit, excitement brewing in my stomach. *Outside*! This would be the first time I got to explore the camp!

"Come on, let's go!" I raced into the clearing, and stopped dead at the entrance. I had seen a bit of the outside clearing from the nursery, but never in my life had I imagined it to be this *huge*. Towering above the camp were stone walls, cut clean by some unimaginable creature.

I bounced around undo the hollow, it was empty except me and the others. The sounds echoed around the room. Then I felt something

hit me in the head, hard. "Ow!" I yowled, and whipped around. Hollykit was smiling, her eyes gleaming. "Stupid mouse-brain!" I meowed back, sort of jokingly.

The ball of moss that had hit me in the head was on the ground. I pounced for it, reached for it, and chucked it over my head. Birdkit caught it. Hollykit ran over, but Birdkit tossed it to Stormkit and head-butted Hollykit. She collapsed on the ground easily.

I padded over to Hollykit, and thought I saw a gleam of sadness, and a little fear in her blue eyes. But when she saw me, Hollykit replaced it with anger and determination. "What are you looking at, mouse-brain?" Hollykit hissed and stormed off to the nursery. She tripped over a pebble on the way, and I almost giggled.

Just then, the bushes up on the cliff to the entrance of the camp rustled.

"Bramble-" I broke off as I saw the sadness glazing his eyes. Behind him, Lionblaze was dragging a limp body. The body of the former deputy, Squirrelflight.

"Why is she sleeping?" I turned to see Birdkit's puzzled face.

"She's not sleeping," Stormkit whispered. "She's dead." He padded over to the medicine cats' den, head lowered in grief.

I followed him, wondering where he was going. "Where are you going?" I asked him. Stormkit turned his head, and replied.

"To Jayfeather. He should know about this."

The medicine cat's den was gloomy, yet nice. It reminded me of the nursery. There was a sudden blast of scents, many of them I had not ever smelled before. A blueish tabby cat was sitting silently in the back of the den. I had heard rumors that Jayfeather was blind, and very grumpy. A brown leaf was laying on the hard rock ground. I picked it up.

"Don't touch that," A low growl came from the medicine cat.

I jumped. *How does he know I picked that up? He is blind*!

Jayfeather whipped around. "Just because I am blind doesn't mean I am stupid. What do you want, anyways?"

His blind blue eyes gazed straight into mine, just as if he could see right at me. His gaze seemed to be mystified and curious, yet it was as if he tried to shut it out with annoyance. I shook the thought away.

Stormkit answered. "Squirrelglight, she's.. she's... dead." His voice trailed off into silence.

Jayfeather's expression darkened. He stalked out of the den, brushing past me and ruffling my fur. The den was left empty, except me and Stormkit.

I looked down at the center of the room. The leaf I had picked up was there, illuminated by the weak sunlight that entered the den this far. As I padded to the entrance, my paws met the leaf, and I heard a crunching noise.

My eyes had to adjust to the burst of sunlight outside. Squirrelflight's body eventually came into focus, along with Jayfeather's tabby shape leaning over her. He was concentrating intensely, prodding here and there.

A few tail-lengths away, I saw Birdkit's sleeping form laying to the side of the nursery. Jayfeather's blind eyes met it the same time I saw her. She wasn't breathing.

Something is terribly wrong

Jayfeather bounded over to Birdkit in two leaps. He sniffed her flank, and froze. I was close enough to hear him murmur;

"Heart disease, since she was the runt of the litter. How is this possible? It has to be an omen. Great StarClan, how many more lives do you have to take..?"

AN ***Yay !*** ***I found an Internet connection at my hotel! I managed to find some time to write another chapter too! Anyways, I am sorry for all the deaths in the book, SAD.. well, stick with me through these first few chapters until the main (and the better) story plot***

comes slowly together! I thank you much for reading!

Chapter Seven

"I can groom myself you know," Stormpaw complained. "*I'm* six moons old!" The three of us were preparing for our apprentice ceremony.

My mother stared down at Stormpaw with loving green eyes. I knew she felt that she had to take care of us, after Birdkit joined StarClan, but she had to realize that we could take care of ourselves. "Oh, okay," she meowed reluctantly. "Just make sure you get that stubborn tuft on your neck."

Once we were ready to present ourselves to the Clan, I padded up to the entrance of the nursery. Even though it was not yet night, the world was dark. Lumbering clouds covered the warriors of silverpelt. Cats were milling outside in the clearing; it looked as if Bramblestar had just called a Clan meeting.

I walked out into the clearing, my head held high, trying not to show how nervous I was. A thin mist was draped over the clearing, and soon soaked me to the skin. When I reached he middle of the clearing, I looked back to see my brother and sister behind me.

A deep voice rumbled above me. "Hollykit, please come forth." I looked up to see a dark brown tabby tom sliding down the rocks into the clearing. I had to crane my neck to see his broad head. This must be Bramblestar. Hollykit tentatively padded forward to the big cat. "Hollykit, from this day forward, you shall be known as Hollypaw until you receive your warrior name," Bramblestar meowed. He lowered his head onto Hollypaw's head and she respectfully licked his shoulder. Then the leader gazed around the crowd, the stopped on one cat. "Berrynose, you are free to take Hollypaw as an apprentice. I trust you to make her a strong and valuable addition to ThunderClan." A creamy warrior stepped out of the crowd, his eyes shining with delight. The mentor and apprentice touched noses. Then, Hollypaw went to stand with the other apprentices, who greeted her with meows of congratulations.

Bramblestar turned to my brother next. "Stormpaw, step forward." Stormpaw boldly stepped from my side, leaving me alone, shivering in the middle of the clearing. He stopped in front of Bramblestar, who looked down on the kit. "Stormkit, from this day forward, you shall be known as Stormpaw." Again, Bramblestar lowered his head onto the newly named apprentice and Stormpaw licked his shoulder in return. "Lionblaze, you will take young Stormpaw as your first apprentice. Being one of the Three, I expect you to make him an excellent fighter, but do not forget the other skills needed to become a warrior." A bright orange tabby stepped out of the crowd this time. The muscles under his skin rippled as he walked. Stormpaw, though, didn't seem the least bit nervous, and reached up to touch his muzzle to Lionblaze's. *I see why Bramblestar put those two together*, I thought to myself. They both had long legs and a stocky build.

"Curlpaw, please step forward." The meow jerked me out of my thoughts. I came up to Bramblestar, my head high. "From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be called Curlpaw." Bramblestar lowered his massive head to mine, and I licked his shoulder. He looked up and scanned the crowd carefully for my mentor. My heart thudded, so loud I thought everyone in the clearing could hear it. "I myself, will mentor Curlpaw." He crowd behind me let out gasps of surprise and congratulations. I looked to Bramblestar, and he seemed to nod to me, though it was so slight, I thought I imagined it. After we both touched muzzles, I walked over to my brother and sister.

"Congratulations!" Stormpaw exclaimed when I reached the two. "I hear it's a great honor to become the leader's apprentice." I nodded my head, slightly embarrassed by all the attention I was getting.

"Come on, Stormpaw, were leaving!" I looked to the cat who had called my brothers name. Lionblaze and Berrynose were standing next to the camp entrance. I padded over to Bramblestar.

"Can we go out with Hollypaw and Stormpaw?" I asked my new mentor. I was longing to see the lake and all the different kinds of prey and anything and everything else the forest had in store for me.

Bramblestar nodded. "Sure, and on he way I'll try to teach you the hunter's crouch. How's that sound?" I nodded this time enthusiastically.

When we arrived outside the barrier of the camp, which of course I was not allowed outside of before this day, I saw all kinds of scents and smells. Even though it was late leaf-fall and leaf-bare was just around the corner, I still smelled a faint trace of prey. I was not sure what kind it was, but it was mouthwatering. Then, I smelled a scent that smelled a bit like the moss warriors brought in for us to drink when I was a kit, but a lot stronger. Bramblestar must have noticed me smelling, because he meowed to me, "That's the lake you're smelling. It's a wide sheet of water, that stretches all the way to RiverClan territory."

We trekked a long way, I'm sure how far, but finally we arrived at the edge of the tree-line. In front of me, the soft forest floor dropped away to a small sandy beach, then dissolved into a huge shining expanse of water. It was just as Brambleclaw had described it: a wide sheet of water. The lake didn't seem to like the weather either; its waters were a churning sea of gray-black. On the other side, lay a stretch of land. I squinted at it. "That's RiverClan territory over there." Lionblaze mewed. "On a clear day, it's easier to see." Lionblaze turned to the left. "Over there is WindClan territory." He waved his tail in a general direction to a long stretch of moor, bare except for a few rocks and bushes. I shivered. *I wouldn't want to live there right now*, I thought. It looked colder than the wind blown lake, and had a heathery smell to it. Lionblaze then turned to the right and pointed with his tail. "And that is ShadowClan territory." I looked over to see a forest that resembled mine, but was much darker with tall pine trees instead of the lower oak and birch trees.

Suddenly, a cold wind blew over the lake and nearly mocked me off my paws. A steady fall of rain had started, and I realized how tired I was. Berrynose seemed to have the same problem. "Let's get back to camp before my paws freeze to the ground!" We all headed back to camp. Even though my pads ached from the cold and my eyes were starting to droop, I couldn't help thinking, *I can't believe I'm an apprentice!*

A/N Sorry guys I haven't updated in a while, I'll try to get to it

some more!

Chapter Eight

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join here beneath Highledge for a Clan meeting." I slid out of the apprentices' den to see cats gathering in the clearing. It was very cold outside today, and I realized that leaf-bare really had arrived. Thin white flakes were drifting down from the cloud covering above. It felt as if my limbs would crack and break into countless pieces when I stretched. Bramblestar had worked me hard yesterday.

Bramblestar was speaking. "Tonight's gathering will be important, and I shall see how the other leaders are fairing after the Great Battle. The cats that are going tonight will be Lionblaze, Graystripe, Cloudtail, Thornclaw, Leafpool, Spirderleg, Birchfall, Berrynose, Cinderheart, Toadstep, Rosepetal, Stormpaw, Hollypaw, Curlpaw, and Purdy. We shall leave at moonrise." The great leader leaped down from Highledge and padded over to the fresh-kill pile, joined by some of the companions that he would take to the gathering. Energy surged through me at the thought of meeting all of the other Clans.

"Isn't this great?" I turned to see Stormpaw, eyes bright. I nodded enthusiastically.

"Come on, let's go and get something to eat, I'm starving!" I walked over to the pile of fresh-kill and squeezed my way through the warriors. I got some grumbles, but no one stopped me or my brother. I chose a juicy chaffinch from the pile, and I headed over to the apprentices' den to share it with Stormpaw. Hollypaw was sharing a tiny brown mouse with Lilypaw, which by some news I had recently been hearing, was the new medicine cat apprentice. I set my chaffinch down, and went over to Hollypaw.

"So, how do you feel about going to the gathering," I asked her. The two young she-cats looked up at me.

Hollypaw frowned and meowed, "I think it would be a good time to get to know our enemies. You never know what secrets they'll spill."

I nodded, thinking this over.

"Aren't you *any* excited about meeting the other Clans?" The gray and silver apprentice shrugged.

I sat down and began plucking gray feathers out of my chaffinch. My stomach was flipping around with excitement and fear about the gathering, I found it tough to eat, even though I was starving not too long ago.

"I'm excited about meeting the other medicine cats. I'll get to learn so much about all the herbs and new ways to heal cats!" Lilypaw commented. She devoured the rest of the mouse in a few famished bites. I never really thought about what medicine cats do at gatherings. *They probably just sit around and talk about dock leaves or ways to cure a cough*. It didn't sound very appealing.

When I finished my prey, I looked to the Warriors of StarClan and saw the moon was almost at its peak. The silver disk was floating among a sea of tiny specks of twinkling light, high up in the sky. I looked to the camp entrance and saw cats gathering there, their pelts turned silver by the moonlight, ready to leave on the journey to the gathering. I padded over to see Bramblestar talking quietly with the senior warriors. I strained my ears, and heard him mutter, "Don't act like we are weak, act as if the battle had never happened. We are strong. . ." I stopped listening, in case I heard something that was not meant to be heard. The Great Battle, as the older warriors called it, was the battle between StarClan and the Clans, and the Dark Forest. Of course, I was not there to witness it all play out, I was not born yet, but I can imagine the slashing claws, the yowling and screeching as the Dark Forest cats fled the Clans' home. . .

"Curlpaw, you coming?" The meow yanked me out of my imagination. I looked up to see Stormpaw looking behind his shoulder. The Clan had already filed out of the camp, and me and Stormpaw were last in the patrol. I nodded and bounded after my Clan, excitement bubbling up in my chest. *I'm going to a gathering!*

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A yowl sounded behind the gathering patrol. I turned to see a group

of gray and brown lithe cats bounding across the grassy moor. The cat in front, Onestar by the way he looked and acted, had worry glimmering in his eyes. He stopped beside Brambleclaw, and his cats mingled with the ThunderClan cats. I was beside Brambleclaw, and could hear what Onestar was whispering to Bramblestar. ". . .happened to Firestar?" As they padded along WindClan territory, the ThunderClan leader's eyes filled with grief.

"He was fighting Tigerstar when lightning hit the tree next to him. No cat knows if he died from the fire, the smoke. . ." I stopped listening to this, seeing that I had heard this conversation many times about my Clan. Most think he died from the fire, but some believe it was the smoke that took his life. I don't really care how he died, I just know he is dead.

I looked up and saw that a island had appeared, and a pine tree next to the island had fallen. The trunk spanned the length of the inlet between the island and the main land. I figured that this was the way to get to the island where the gathering would take place. As we approached, the island got bigger and bigger, until it became bigger than my camp. On the edges, there was a sandy shore, then there were trees that were so thick that I couldn't see what was at the center, though I could guess. All the warriors told of the Great Oak that sat in the middle of the clearing, where all the leaders addressed the Clans.

Being in the front of the ThunderClan group, I could see Onestar politely dipping his head to Bramblestar, letting his Clan go in front of his own. Bramblestar gave a mew of thanks, then hopped up nobly onto the fallen tree. Lionblaze followed, then it was my turn. I leaped up onto the pine, and immediately felt the bark had been washed away, and smooth wood had been left in its place. I extended my claws into the smooth wood, trying to get some kind of a grip. Carefully lifting one foot from the tree, I took small steps, as if I was a kit just learning how to use its legs. Once I got the hang of it, I started to walk normally, and found I could do it with quite ease, and jumped down on the other side, the gathering island.

It felt good to be on sturdy and safe ground, but I also missed the rush of excitement it gave me. Two cats, Bumblestripe and Icecloud, were standing behind me, and we're heading for the bushes in front

of me. I followed them, not wanting to get lost on this strange island, and found myself emerging into a medium-sized clearing. It was packed full of cats with different scents and smells. There were three main types of cats, I decided after studying them for awhile. There were the sleek and well-fed kind of cats that I identified almost at once as RiverClan, because of their fishy sent. I wrinkled my nose when I smelled them. Then of course there was ThunderClan, who had the hard muscles, and broad shoulders. Then there was ShadowClan, who was also pretty easy to identify by their darkened pelts and piney smell.

I wandered over to a group of other apprentices, bigger than me. Looking them over, I saw that they were a mix of WindClan and ShadowClan. They were all looking towards a heavily muscled tom. ". . . shoved the mangy ThunderClan cat's face into the dirt. He nearly begged me to let him go." I shivered, and slunk away from this group.

Spotting my brother talking with a different, more friendlier band of apprentices, I padded over. "Hey Stormpaw." He looked already like the other apprentices, big and strong muscled. The two other cats looked over and I identified them as both RiverClan, brother and sister by the looks of it.

"Hi Curlpaw," he meowed brightly. "This is Troutpaw," he pointed with his tail to the pale gray tabby she-cat with yellow eyes. "And this is Rushpaw." Rushpaw was a light brown tabby tom, with the same yellow eyes.

The two apprentices were looking at me with curiosity. After a long and drawn out awkward silence, I meowed, "I'm Curlpaw."

Troutpaw gave a little chuckle. "Is it because of your ears?" I looked up instinctively, then realizing I couldn't see my ears, I nodded.

Suddenly, a loud yowling broke through the ongoing buzz of conversation, silencing the cats in the clearing. I looked up to see a huge white cat, except for his jet black paws. He looked very commanding. "Who's that?" I whispered to Rushpaw.

"That's Blackstar, the ShadowClan leader," she whispered back. "My

leader is Mistystar, who is that blue-gray she cat. Onestar is WindClan leader, which is the brown tabby." I nodded my thanks to her.

"ThunderClan, I am sorry to accuse," he broke off in a coughing fit. A small tabby rushed up to the roots of the tree, but Blackstar shooed him away. He stood to full height and began again. "I accuse ThunderClan-" this time it wasn't a coughing fit, but he slipped off the branch, and plummeted to the bare earth below. I heard a thump and a faint crack as he hit. I gasped, but it was masked in all of the other cats yowling of confusion and worry. The leaders on the tree looked as stunned as any other of the cats. This was not planned. Medicine cats swarmed Blackstar to check if he was okay

There was noise from every Clan, but one yowl rose above the rest.

"Blackstar is dead!"

Chapter Nine

I didn't even try to rush over to the white body. Everyone else thought it was a good idea to try and see if he was still alive, even though the medicine cats told otherwise. Next to me, Hollypaw gasped, but didn't really sound like she was actually surprised. I thought I saw a small smile creep onto her face, but I couldn't get a good look with all the cats panicking. I decided I had imagined it.

"ThunderClan, we're heading home!" A voice rose over the clamor, Bramblestar's deep yowl. I followed the voice and soon came upon my Clan, leaving through the bushes. I bounded after them, relieved to escape the crowd of confused cats, but also worried. Why had Blackstar died so suddenly? I thought what Bumblestripe had told me, a couple of days before when he was teaching me about the other Clans. He said Blackstar was an older leader, but last ThunderClan had heard from him, he was strong and healthy. Obviously he had changed dramatically in the last moon. But one thought kept entering my mind, despite me trying to block it out: If Blackstar was killed by it, who would it strike next?

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I woke with a start to a sight I recognized, but at the same time I had no idea where I was. A great cone of darkness reaching from cloud to ground was tearing up a twoleg place, and a bright orange cat and a gray tabby were running across a muddy field in front of me. Both had curled ears like me.

I knew what would happen next. The tabby looked over, his green eyes blazing with fear, and saw a flying piece of debris. He shoved the bigger cat out of the way, causing the large thing to crash into him with such force it knocked him off his paws. There was a crunch and a crack, then he disappeared into the trees, body limp as a piece of fresh-kill. "Tabby!" I screeched the name unwillingly, and the sound coming from my mouth sounded. . . off. Not like me.

"Curl, get back in the woods!" The orange cat yelled. I was about to

obey, when a great gust swept me off my paws, and threw me several tree lengths into the air. I didn't try to struggle, or flail my paws about as if it would help, I just stayed still, and waited for the end. Through the rainy fog, I saw the ground approaching fast. I was heading towards a swollen river that had long since burst its banks, faster and faster.

Just as I was one mouse-length from the brown water, I jerked awake, panting, to a lightening apprentice den. I sighed in relief. I had had this dream multiple times since I joined the Clan, and every time I woke up later in the dream, which meant closer to the river. I shivered wondering what would happen when I actually hit.

But there was something else about the dream, something else I couldn't explain. It was kind of as if StarClan was trying to send me a message through a dream, but I couldn't believe that. Only medicine cats and every once in a while a leader got dreams from StarClan.

The next day, I tried explaining it to my brother, but he wouldn't listen. He dismissed the idea as a crazy dream. I didn't even get to tell him it came almost every night before he sent me away. These days, Stormpaw was very busy with Lionblaze, training, hunting, patrolling borders. When I went to Hollypaw, she had almost the identical reaction, but a bit more aggressive. She thought that there might be something wrong with me, but I ignored this. She had been increasingly more aggressive the farther her training went on.

The days past by in a sort of blur. Training, patrolling the WindClan border, the ShadowClan border, hunting. Stormpaw was already as big as Honeypaw and Seedpaw, even though they were a whole moon older than him. Cinderheart moved into the nursery with Lionblaze's kits, expecting them to come a moon later, but this didn't make Lionblaze take time off from Stormpaw. If anything, he trained my brother harder. Bramblestar was a fair and tough leader at the same time. He was patient and kind when I got something wrong and praised me when I did something correctly.

About half a moon after Blackstar's death, something happened. I was walking into the Apprentice's den, and Honeypaw, Stormpaw, and Hollypaw were already there, in their nests. I had just about

reached my own when Honeypaw got up. "Hey Curlpaw!" She had acted like we were long lost friends, who hadn't seen each other in a moon. Honeypaw touched her muzzle to mine, then sat down in the nest next to mine. This surprised me, because in the last few days, Stormpaw and Honeypaw were spending more and more time together. I looked to Stormpaw with questioning eyes, but he was just as puzzled. I reluctantly lay down next to her, and she started to groom me. Hollypaw was scowling at me, like usual, as if I was doing something wrong. The last thing I saw before sleep took me, was Stormpaw's envious eyes staring at me and Honeypaw.

When I woke, in the middle of the night though, I felt something was wrong. Beside me, Honeypaw's body heat kept me warm, but when I looked up, there was only two other apprentices in the den. Hollypaw was gone. Maybe she just went to the dirt place, I thought. I'll wait a little longer before I worry. I glanced at the half moon, that was almost at its peak, then lay my head down on my paws and waited.

When the moon was at its peak, I decided to go and look for my sister. Perhaps she went for a night hunt and got injured. The thought jerked me awake. I got up and, careful not to wake the sleeping Honeypaw curled up right next to me, and left the den.

The night was cool, but not cold. Leafbare had already arrived, and it was unusually warm. It was easy to track my sisters sent that lead to the entrance of the camp. I arrived at the entrance, and felt something was out of place. Finally, it struck me. No one was guarding the camp! I looked down to see a dark trail of a liquid. I leaned down to smell it.

Blood.

Birchfall's scent was mixed with the scent of Hollypaw's guilt. She knew she was doing wrong, yet she didn't stop. The scent was fairly fresh, probably from when I was just waking up. I followed the trail, and came to the source of the smell. A body was lying underneath a withered bush, a brown tabby body. Birchfall was still breathing, to my relief, but it was shallow. I was reaching down to grab his scruff to heave him out from under the bush when a meow sounded from behind me.

"Well, well, well. What do we have here?"

Chapter Ten

A/N Wow, thank you guys for helping us reach five hundred reads! It means so much to me when you comment, vote, or even read this. Keep on reading (for more suspense :P)!

I whipped around to see a black figure, amber eyes glinting in the moonlight with harsh anger. "I. . ." It was as if StarClan had made it so I was unable to talk. The warrior, Spiderleg I realized after closer inspection, roughly yanked me off my paws and carried me back into the camp, which I had just left, by my scruff. When he reached the middle, he threw me down as if I was a piece of fresh-kill, and the landing knocked all of the air from my lungs. Before I could gulp a breath, he had me pinned down on the ground, one paw on my shoulder, one on my throat. Blood welled up in the spots his claws sank into my fragile skin. He fiercely growled something to me, but I didn't hear him. A loud ringing was blocking my hearing.

I tried sucking in air, but realized with panic that the long-limbed warrior was not-knowingly blocking my windpipe. The last thing I saw before I blacked out was my mother's pale gray pelt sprinting from the Warriors' den, and the fear in Spiderleg's eyes as he realized he was literally choking me to death.

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I sucked in air and opened my eyes to a bright den. For all I knew, it could have been my first breath in hours. It sure felt like it. "He's awake!" I heard the excited meow and looked to the left to see Honeypaw sitting beside me. I groaned, because whenever I moved, my shoulder ached. Every breath was painful. To my right, Stormpaw and my mother and father were sitting and worried glances were getting exchanged between them.

"What happened?" I mumbled. "Where's Birchfall?" I remembered the scene from when I was last conscious, and tried sitting up. To my surprise, my left forepaw slipped out from under me, and I was back on the ground in an instant. Everyone seemed on edge and

reluctant to answer my question.

"Careful." I looked up to see Jayfeather, blind blue eyes staring out of focus at me. "We wouldn't want to reopen the wound, now would we?" Something about the way the medicine cat meowed this was wrong. Just then, I swore I saw him nod, but it was so tiny I could have imagined it. What's going on? I looked to my mother for help, but she turned away, as if ashamed of me. My father and brother both blinked sympathetically at me, but didn't give me an answer. Sitting at the entrance to the den, Hollypaw looked guilty. Slowly, she got up and stalked away, tail raised, as if in defiance.

At last I turned to Honeypaw. She leaned in close and licked me between my ears. Her eyes were pools of sorrow now. "The other cats think. . ." She broke off, and turned away. When she turned back, she burst out, "Everyone thinks you tried to murder Birchfall!" I stared in disbelief at the golden she-cat. How could that be? "I honestly think you would do no such thing, and it had to have been a rogue." With this, my friend curled up next to me in a sign of comfort.

I lay my head down and tried to go to sleep. It was kind of as if I was half-conscious, asleep, but awake at the same time. I squirmed around, too hot, or too cold, and I kept seeing images of the broken and bleeding Birchfall. Finally, I opened my eyes to see a grassy meadow. Snow was on the ground, and everything looked peaceful. But then, to my horror, I realized that the snow was turning red. The scent of blood and death rose into the air.

I turned around at a thumping sound, like tons of cats running at once. Tons of cats, were in fact running straight towards me. I scanned the cats running by. Mothwing, Sorreltail, Mistystar, Dustpelt. They were going by too fast now. I almost yowled aloud as i looked down. These cats were running through my body! I turned to see what the group of cats, all the Clans, I realized, were running to. Opposite the clearing, another stampede of cats were running towards the Clans. They were dark pelted and they showed their fangs as they approached.

The two crashed together in a flurry of blood, teeth, and claws. I saw Sandstorm murdered by one of the dark cats. Onestar was on

the ground, blood pulsing from a wound in his side, and his eyes were glazed open. Stormpaw was there too, his dark gray pelt stained with red. A dark cat, at least twice as high pounced on him as if he was a piece of prey.

None of this I saw, though. The one cat who was leading the dark cats that the Clans were fighting against was. . . No. I couldn't even bring myself to think of them. Not them. It couldn't be them. This was all just a bad nightmare that I would wake up from any heartbeat now. I closed my eyes and waited.

When I opened them, though, I was still there, but there was no noise. The battling cats made no sound when they were injured, no sound when they beat an opponent, and not even a sound when they were killed, though they opened their mouths as if they were. I could only hear a loud ringing, coming from somewhere inside my head. It felt as if my head was going to explode from the ringing it was so loud.

To my rising horror, every one of the Clan cats were picked off, their bodies left in the middle of the clearing as. . . the lead cat . . . gathered up their cats and left the clearing. Triumph showed on every one of their faces.

"No. ." I whispered as I stared at the body-littered clearing. Cloudtail, dead. Lionblaze, dead. Even Stormpaw and Honeypaw, dead. But there was one cat who still lived on.

I turned and ran as far as I could, away from the nightmare, as far as my legs would let me travel, until finally, I wasn't running. I was falling. I looked down to see myself plunging into the stone hollow to certain death. The moment I hit was the moment I woke. This time, the sky was just turning bright when I looked up. No one was with me, except for the sleeping Jayfeather a few tail-lengths away. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief. It was just a bad dream after all.

I stood up, and stretched, and felt my brown legs beneath me feel sturdy for the first time in what felt like days. The ringing was still echoing in my ears, but it was not as loud now. As I was picking my way to the entrance, planning to go for a run, and to shake all the bad things that had recently happened off, I saw a sight I wished I

hadn't. Birchfall was sitting opposite of the den from me. There were claw marks all over his tabby body, and a deep long scar stretched along one flank. His throat fur had been ripped away, revealing pink raw skin bandaged in cobwebs. I could hear his unsteady breathing now, hoarse and rough. Some cat had obviously tried to murder him.

Hurriedly, I padded over to the camp entrance. Bumblestripe was guarding. "I'm just going out for a run," I meowed.

The stripped warrior nodded. "Don't get lost," he replied evenly. I headed out into the woods. When I had reached my destination, I stopped. I was at the border between ThunderClan and WindClan, but I hadn't really decided in my mind I was coming here. My paws took me here. I gazed out across the moor, and saw the in the brightening sky, clouds off in the distance. Leaf-bare was coming, weather the Clans liked it or not, and they had to be prepared.

When the sun had fully risen, I decided it was time to go back. As I was turning around, there was a rustle in the bushes. Instantly my dream came rushing back, as if called by some invisible force. I unsheathed my thorn-sharp claws, ready to fight. I felt the blood rushing through my veins at the prospect of a fight. But all that came out was a small hare, that had seemingly strayed across he border. I stalked it, not daring to breathe. This will be a good meal for Cinderheart and the other queens.

I pounced and easily caught the brown hare between my front paws, and took its life by biting its throat. But as I set the hare down to get a better grip on it, I saw a cat, not a hare laying on the ground, lifeless. A gap was in its throat where I had just bitten. I backed away, startled, and lost my footing on the bank. The weight of my body was too much for the bank, and it gave way, showering me with tiny flecks of water, then I was plunged into it. My claws sank deep into the grass on the bank that had held. For a moment, I just hung on, afraid to do anything. Finally, I heaved myself out of the water, and onto the grass. I started to shiver, realizing how cold it had become since I had caught the rabbit. A tiny snow crystal landed on my nose as I pushed myself up into a sitting position

I picked up my catch and growled, "Stupid rabbit."

Chapter Eleven

A/N I'm so sorry guys I haven't updated in a while, school has kept me busy , and these chapters take so long to write . Keep with me these last four chapters, I promise something exciting will happen this chapter! I'll try to finish the book by the end of March, so then I can start the next book in the series!

I didn't really pay any attention to the days passing by. They all seemed to contain the same thing: wake up, hunting patrol, eat, clean out someone's den, border patrol, eat, sleep. Still, Hollypaw was becoming increasingly more and more angry at the world. One day on a hunting patrol, I caught her turning her catch into a bloody red mush. She was clawing her catch as if she would claw an enemy. I shivered, then turned away, not wanting to have anything to do with it.

Finally, the moon was full, and the time for a gathering had arrived. I was not chosen to go to the gathering, but Stormpaw was. "Tell me all about it when you get back," I had told him. He nodded his dark gray head and turned to follow the Clan out into the snowy weather. It felt as though something was going to happen at the gathering, like the air was supercharged, and everyone was on edge.

I went into the empty apprentice's den and curled up in my nest, then fell asleep.

Next thing I knew, I was being prodded awake by a paw. I turned over, trying to ignore it. "Go away."

This time the paw poked harder. "Ow! What do you want?" I turned back to see a gray pelt, white flecks of snow sprinkling it. The Clan must have just arrived back from the gathering.

Stormpaw's eyes were sparkling with excitement. "Rowanstar declared that we would battle them at the next half moon! He was talking nonsense, stuff about ThunderClan scent drifting over the

border. He must have nettles in his brain to think that! Anyway, everyone is preparing for battle and are fixing the barriers. Come and help!" I looked up to a pre-daw sky. I wanted to sleep, but realized I would have no chance. A warrior or someone would tell me to come and help either way.

I heaved my body out of my nest reluctantly and stretched. As I emerged from the apprentice's den, I saw the snow-covered clearing bustling with cats working. Stormpaw walked over to Honeypaw and asked her something. I couldn't hear what he was meowing, but Honeypaw nodded and scooched over to let Sormpaw join. She was eating a vole.

I narrowed my eyes suspiciously. He had just told me to come and work, yet here he was, sitting there having a meal with another apprentice. I huffed an annoyed sigh. I could never figure out those two.

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Paws thundered out of the clearing, leaving me behind. The ThunderClan patrol had just left the camp, heading for the long-disputed clearing in ThunderClan's territory. This was the battle that Rowanstar had picked, thinking that ThunderClan scent had somehow strayed across the border. Obviously Rowanstar was no more peaceful than Blackstar.

A lot of cats were on the first battle patrol, but I had not been chosen. I was on the second, back-up patrol with a handful of other cats. Jayfeather had cleared me for the battle. I just had a few minor scratches from Spiderleg, and slight head damage, but nothing worth the medicine cat's time. Whitecough had begun to spread throughout the camp, its first victim being Blossomfall.

Stormpaw was not on the patrol either, he was with me on the second patrol. The gray apprentice was hopping on one foot to the other, as if he was on burning coals. "You excited?"

He stopped. "Of course! Aren't you? This is what we have been training for, all these moons, and I finally get to expirience a real battle!"

"I never thought of it that way," I replied in thought. It sort of felt like we were getting our skills tested to the limits, but Stormpaw wasn't thinking of the cats that would be injured, or killed. He was just thinking of the rush of power and enemy fur beneath your claws. Bumblestripe once told me that that quality makes a cat a great warrior if put in the right paws, but if put in the wrong paws. . . Bumblestripe never finished his sentence.

We waited, milling around the camp, as if trapped in its artificial walls of stone. The sun went down, and the moon rose. Still the second patrol was ordered to wait. Screeches and yowls ripped through the still night air every so often, and it sent a chill, down my spine. Finally, a cat burst through the entrance. Every cat looked up.

"The second patrol. . . We need backup now. . ." Lilypaw wheezed and lay down. It looked as if she had run all the way here without stopping. Every cat on the second wave gathered up and headed through the entrance, Lionblaze leading. As we got nearer and nearer to the battle, the screeches of cats in pain got louder until it felt as though all the Clans were fighting here at once.

We emerged onto the moonlit battleground. The only word I could describe it as was chaos. Cat versus cat until one begged to be let go. The sound of fur ripping and bone thumping against ground was clear now. The central place where most of the fighting was taking place at the core was about a tree-length in front of me. There were about seven or eight cats on my patrol-

My thoughts were interrupted by a loud yowl from Lionblaze. "ThunderClan, attack!" We shot down the clearing and plunged into the mass of fur, teeth and claws. Immediately, a dark brown she-cat thumped into my side, throwing me off my paws. I crashed into another ThinderClan warrior, Thronclaw as I would realize later. I got to my paws instantly and raked my claws across the ShadowClan cat's face. Blood spurted out from the wound I inflicted, and the warm sticky liquid got in my eyes. I blinked several times, and when I recovered, I saw the she-cat had ran into the forest on her side, presumably been beaten. Then, I realized I must had blinded her. Permanently. I didn't have time to feel sorry, because an even larger tom that stunk of pines and sap lumbered up

to me.

The white and gray warrior lunged at me, but I ducked under him and ran my claws across his belly as he flew above me, using my size as a skill. As soon as I landed, I whipped around, but my opponent was faster. He bowled me over and we rolled, locked in vicious combat, swiping claws at each other. Suddenly, his weight lifted, and I saw Bramblestar, who had arrived in the first patrol. He was beaten and bloody, but still battle-hungry. "Need some help?" Together, we drove the tom backwards into his own territory. I gave him a last stinging blow to his flank, and he fled off, in need of medical attention.

This victory relief didn't last long as another opponent lunged for me, a scratch on his eyes bleeding heavily. I dodged just in time, and he flew past me. As I turned, I heard him jeer at me. "Stupid little kit! You think you could beat a warrior like me?" I turned to see if Bramblestar would come to help me this time, but as I looked, he was fighting alongside Sandstorm a couple of fox-lengths away.

"Your puny little leader isn't here to save-" I cut him off with a yowl of rage. I flew at him, taking the tabby by surprise and knocking him off his paws. The warrior recovered quickly though and shoved me off him. I smacked against a tree hard, and I heard a disturbing crunching noise. Pain shot up my spine as the opponent grabbed me and started to claw my exposed stomach. Over and over again, he raked his claws across until I was bleeding heavily from my belly.

"Stop!" I gasped out through the pain. "Stop!

He stopped, and growled, "Oh? Had enough?"

He raised one claw, glistening with my blood in the air, intending to finish me off, but instead a cat yowled from the thickest of the fighting, "ShadowClan, retreat!"

My almost-murderer cursed and meowed, "This isn't over, kit." He sprang to his feet and hurtled away with the rest of his Clan.

I got to my feet, shakily and stumbled over to the main clearing. Blackness stalked at the edge of my vision, and my stomach was on

fire. Most of the ThunderClan cats were standing, but some were sprawled across on their flanks. I went over to one unmoving body, closest to me. It wasn't breathing. As I took a closer look at the pelt, I realized it was Stormpaw.

I collapsed on my side, unconscious, realizing that I might never see my brother alive again.

Chapter Twelve

I slowly opened my eyes, crust encrusting them shut. I was in a forest, filled with the bright green plants and undergrowth of greenleaf, dappled sun wavering on the grassy forest floor. It looked so peaceful, so different from the vicious battle that had just took place. But something was different . . . almost as if this was a dream.

I tried to remember what happened last before I blacked out. I shut my eyes. White flashed before them, cold as ice. Screeching and yowling echoed in my ears, and I tried to open my eyes, but I couldn't. It got louder and louder, so loud I felt as if I wanted to scream. Finally it stopped abruptly. I carefully opened my eyes and now found my self on the battlefield. I looked around, a loud ringing sounding in my ears. Suddenly there was a fierce yowl behind me, which drew my attention. I whipped around to see an orange tom, with large green eyes staring into mine. His pelt was the color of fire, and it glinted off the rays of sun catching on it. I knew immidiately the moment my eyes set on him this was the great leader Firestar, even though I had never seen him before in my life. How I knew that, I did not know.

The orange cat's fur was waving, as if in water and he seemed almost blurry in a way. A scared glint flashed in his eyes. "Curlpaw," he managed to meow at me. It sounded faint, as if he was communicating from far far away. I cocked my ears up, intent on what the StarClan cat had to tell me. "My time is almost up. The fate of the Clans rests in your paws, be careful who you trust it with . . ." He trailed off and looked around nervously as if he didn't want to say what he was going to, almost like he was hiding a secret.

"What is it Firestar?"

He looked at me straight in my eyes and meowed, "Curlpaw, this is a lot to take in for such a young cat like you, but every cat is endanger from the Dark Forest. They have been taking cats who were meant to go to StarClan and recruiting them to their force . . ."

His voice was getting weaker by the second. "Any cat who tries to leave is punished. Killed in more brutal ways than you could imagine. And it's not just the Clans their taking cats in from, it's all around the lake and beyond, including rogues and kittypets. StarClan is no more. No cat is safe from . . ." Now his voice was completely faded away, less than a whisper on the wind. Firestar's mouth was still moving, but just barely.

Suddenly, the leader's paws started discintigrating into tiny particles, as if he was made from sand. The wind picked up, and more of him started to dissolve. I looked to the source of the wind and saw a great black and gray swirling mass of wind coming from the clouds. I knew exactly what it was too. The Great Wind. I was frozen to the spot as images swirled past my eyelids and danced away into the wind. A barn. A fire sweeping through a forest. A tabby tom with curled ears like mine rushing across a grassy field. A swelling river shown from above. After that they went by too fast to recognize. I was rooted to the spot as the swirling mass came closer and closer, threatening to engulf me.

I heard a screech and a thump and a crack, and I had no idea if they were my screams or not. "Curl!" I heard the name yowled in my ears, echoing over and over again until they stopped. The all noises were cut off and my vision went blank, streaked of all color.

Battles will rage, cats will die, but in the end, curled silence will rise.

***

"Is he dead?" I heard the patter of paws and the scritch of claws on stone as small kit paws ran. I lifted my head and opened my eyes. This time for sure, it was not a dream. I was staring into deep blue eyes, only a mouse-length away from me. I groaned.

"Dewkit! Stay away from Curlpaw, he was badly injured in the battle and he needs to rest." That was Brightheart, I was guessing. Dewkit scampered away, his gray pelt standing on end.

The kit's small face was replaced with Jayfeather's blind blue eyes staring unfocuedly at me. "You're awake, I see." The small gray

tabby was sorting herbs into piles, as all medicine cats do after a battle. "I was wondering if you were ever going to wake up. Your heart actually stopped for some time, you know." I was surprised by this, but I had other things to worry about. I was dying to tell Jayfeather about my dream, but with Brightheart here . . .

Jayfeather seemed to sense that I had something to tell him in private, so he shooed the queen and her kits out of the medicine cats' den. he turned his blind blue eyes on me, wondering what I had to say. I gulped. "Well, I had this dream . . ." I told him about it in detail, and when I had finished, Jayfeather hadn't moved. "Do you believe me?"

Finally the gray tabby turned slowly, as if taking all of what I just said in. "Yes, of course. You are the prophecized cat." I was surprised he didn't even seemed shocked.

"A-aren't we going to do something about it?"

Jayfeather shoved his face a mouse-length in front of my own. "What can we do, Curlpaw?" I leaped back at Jayfeather's outrage. "We just have to see what happens, and take it from there," he went on more calmly.

I nodded and lay down again. My stomach was starting to hurt. Suddenly, I remembered something. "Stormpaw! Is he okay?" To my relief, the medicine cat nodded.

"He was in worse condition than you, but he just barely pulled through. Honestly, I thought he wasn't going to make it throught the night, but he's a fighter." He pointed with his slender tail to behind me. "He's over there, but try not to disturb him too much, he needs all the rest he can get." Before Jayfeather finished his sentence, I was on my feet. Stormpaw was stretched out on his side revealing a long scar on his flank that looked deep, but had healed over time. One of his ears was ripped badly and I could tell a claw or two had ripped from his paw, because of the dried blood on it. Not only that, but there was multiple wounds on his belly that were patched in cobwebs and smeared with some herb mixture. Whoever Stormpaw had been fighting had been quite a seasoned warrior.

To my surprise, the gray tabby lifted his head and purred at the sight of me. "Curlpaw!" He noticed my belly wounds and meowed, "Who did that to you? He must have very viscous."

I purred. "You don't look in too well of shape either, Stormpaw. I see that Lionblaze's powers haven't exactly been passed down from me too to apprentice." Stormpaw chuckled weakly, then the laugh turned into a cough.

"I'd better leave you to rest. Want some prey?" He shook his head.

"I'm not hungry, but maybe later though." I mewed in agreement and left him to his much-needed sleep. I grabbed a sparrow from the pile and settled down. It was stringy all right, but it was leaf-bare. I figured I needed all the strength I could get.

Looking around the clearing, I couldn't help wondering: Will the Dark Forest recruit enough cats to assemble an army big enough to take out the Clans? Once and for all?

Chapter Thirteen

A/N Wow, I can't believe we're nearing the end of this story! I promise I'll post see more often. Also, chapter 15, the last one, shall also be extra long and exciting, just for you guys! I'll try to post these last three chapters before the end of February, yeah? I think that's good. Ciao! ~Curl

Two moons later

"Jump!" I jumped over the tabby cat's massive shoulders, landing just behind him. When I had turned around, my opponent already was facing me, getting ready to leap again at me. Before he had the chance, I whipped out a paw at him that struck the top of his head. Instinctively, he looked up, and I used this chance to slide under his belly. As I did so, the cat dropped all of his weight onto me, making me force all my air out of my lungs. I wouldn't get beaten though, so I lifted my back enough for me to turn flip upside down. It was a risky move, but it was nessacary. I put my hind legs on his stomach and heaved. As I had expected, he flew off of me and landed a few tail lengths away with a thump.

I got to my paws quickly and turned, my tail lashing. The ThunderClan leader was, like always, on his paws before me, his eyes shining with pleasure. "I have trained you well, Curlpaw." I nodded my thanks. "That was quite an advanced move you did there." He walked over to me and lay his brown tail on my back. "You will earn your warrior name in no time. But in the meantime, we should go and practice climbing. Enough battle training for today." Bramblestar turned and padded over to the entrance to the clearing, and I followed behind him, a thrill of excitement pulsing through me. My mentor didn't take me tree climbing, like all the other mentors did. I don't know why, because I thought that it was ThunderClan's special skill. I shrugged in my head.

When we arrived at the tree, I looked up. Above my head towered s massive oak tree, with plenty of paw-holds near the base, but the higher it rose, the less there were. The branches became thinner

and the actual tree waved in the higher gusts. "Ready?" I glanced over at Bramblestar. His neck fur was slightly fluffed up, as if he was uneasy around the tree. I had never seen him like it before. Usually the leader was very confident and sure about what he was doing, but this was different. Memory sparked in his eyes. He was remembering something.

I looked away, unsettled and disturbed. I placed a paw on the tree and felt a shockwave travel through my body, from paw to tail. It lasted a mere heartbeat, but I was shocked to the bone. My instincts told me to back down, to not climb and give up. But my mind fought back. I put another paw on this time and heaved my body up onto the trunk of the towering tree.

At first, climbing the tree was the easiest thing I had ever done, it felt natural. But when I had gotten to the leaves of most of the other smaller trees, things started to get a bit tougher. The branches got thinner. The trunk was skinnier. When I reached the halfway point, I looked over the flowing forest leaves before me and past that, the lake. The shimmering silver and gray sheet of water glinted in the early new-leaf sun. Looking up, I climbed determinedly higher and higher until I felt the air get thinner. I looked down and saw a tiny speck of brown. A squirrel? No, I realized it was Brambleclaw.

He looked to be as small as an ant from my vantage point and I reached my paw out, pretending to squash him. But as soon as my paw left the branch, I heard a terrible snapping sound from behind me. I didn't get a chance to turn my head, or even take in a breath before I was plunging through the leaves of the tree, down and down to the leaf-strewn ground.

Time slowed down. I saw the leaves whipping my face as I plummeted down, my insides flipping. I could see Bramblestar's shape magnify and I saw he was jumping up in down I panic. He couldn't save me. No one could now, gravity would do its toll on me, and I highly doubted I would survive this fall. In the way back of my mind, I felt fear and desperation as my descend continued. But in most of my head was a strange place called peace. The view was great. I shook my head and almost laughed I could be even thinking of the view right now.

Screams echoed from below and I realized Bramblestar's yowling had attracted a nearby patrol. I sighed in my head. They honestly didn't think they could save me, did they? A screech was ripped from my throat, the first one in fact, when my head was snapped back as a branch clipped my chin. Now all I could feel was pain. It was so real, it was almost tangible. I tasted blood in my mouth and realized I had most likely broken my jaw because I couldn't move it.

Looking down, I was only about three heartbeats from the ground, about where the leaves of the other surrounding trees were. Now panic gripped my entire body as I saw what would come next. Icy claws gripped my heart. I would never again talk to Stormpaw, or any of my other friends. I closed my eyes for the last time and waited for the end. The crunching of bones hitting the ground, my blood spilling from my body, my-

"Curl!"

My eyes jerked open. I was at the top of the tree. A shaky gasp of relief was released from my lungs. I had imagined it all. The tree fall, the crunching bone. All of it was fake. A dream. It felt so real, though.

Almost as if it was a memory.

***

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join here beneath Highledge for a Clan meeting!" The echoing yowl reverberated against the stone hollow as I entered the ThunderClan camp. I squinted in suspicion. Bramblestar had run ahead of me, telling me that he had important business to attend to. This must be it.

I settled in between Stormpaw and Honeypaw as Bramblestar began speaking. A kit cried out, but it's voice was quickly silenced by a scolding mother. "These are dark days for ThunderClan," he started. "Sacafices are to be made and choices every cat does not want to make are to be chosen." I didn't like how Bramblestar was beginning this speech. Looking over at my brother, I saw my own uncertainty reflected back into my own eyes. "I have decided that ThunderClan has grown strong enough to battle ShadowClan once

more, to show them a sign of strength, a sign that ThunderClan is not a weak merciful Clan, but one that is loyal and undefeated." A shocked silence greeted his words.

My heart fluttered at this daring challenge. Another battle? I wasn't so sure this was such a good of a choice. ShadowClan had been forced to retreat after ThunderClan's show of strength, and it was good to show strength and courage, but this?

"No!"

Every cats' heads turned to where the screech came from. Sandstorm was crouched down in a defeated pose, looking pitiful and miserable. "This is not what Firestar would have wanted," I was close enough to hear her mutter. "Firestar would not approve of this."

Bramblestar was close enough too, apparently. "Firestar is not here." A couple cats gasped. My heart thumped in its cage, threatening to explode. Cats everywhere were panicking. A voice rose above the clamor.

"Everyone, calm down. Calm down!" Lionblaze had the magic touch and everyone stopped talking, slowly, but surely. "We will leave for ShadowClan tomorrow morning first thing. Be ready." Lionblaze started calling out the names of the cats that would be on the patrol, but I didn't even bother to listen. Thoughts were jamming into my mind. Why did Bramblestar want to start a war with ShadowClan? And of all Clans, why ShadowClan? I shook my head in despair. I didn't even know if Bramblstar knew what he was doing.

". . . Curlpaw, Dovewing . . ." My head shot up at my name being called. I didn't think I would be chosen, with all my recent battle wounds. But then again, which cat didn't have wounds? Fear pulsed through me, then turned to excitement. I'm going to be in another battle! Most apprentices went through their entire apprenticeship without being in a single battle, and here I am pouting over being in a battle. I pulled my lips up in a smile. This would be great.

But in a small part in the back of my mind, I knew that the smile

was fake.

***

"Isn't this going to be great?" Me and Hollypaw were sharing a finch, Stormpaw washing himself quietly beside us. Awkwardly, Honeypaw was sitting close to me, so our fur brushed. I resisted the urge to squirm. Hollypaw had asked the question. Her silver and black pelt strood on end, in excitement, I guessed.

"Ah, I'm not sure it was such a good desicion on Bramblestar's part but he is leader . . ." That was Stormpaw. I could tell he was weighing the pros and the cons of fighting ShadowClan once more. I knew he loved to fight - and was good at it - but Stormpaw wasn't the kind of cat who would rush into battle without thinking. He had to have a very good reason. My father told me he reminded him of Firestar a lot.

"Oh come on you!" Honeypaw shoved him with a paw playfully. The two seemed to have gotten over their argument, but didn't seem to be anything more than friends. "You're such a thinker. I for one say that we should show ShadowClan our strength. If I ever met a warrior from their flea-brained Clan, I would rip him to shreds and feed him to the vultures." I shivered, despite the joking tone in her voice. Honeypaw had never been in a real battle before. She didn't know what it was like, facing a warrior twice your size, skill and confidence. She didn't know real pain . . .

I shook my head. "Bramblestar doesn't know what he's saying. Another battle with ShadowClan will prove nothing. Perhaps it will make them even more angrier at us and they'll just fight back with more strength. As the saying goes, don't poke a wasp nest if you don't need to."

A laugh startled me from behind.

I cocked my head to see Cloudtail sitting with his tail wrapped around his paws, watching us argue. "You," he pointed with his tail to Hollypaw. "Have nothing in common with your brothers." Amusement flashed in his eyes.

"They think too much," Hollypaw flashed back as if Cloudtail had insulted her. I rolled my eyes at Hollypaw's drama.

I got to my paws and stretched, leaving the warmth of Honeypaw's pelt. "You two seem to be getting along well." Cloudtail flicked his tail submissively. "You two youngsters can go run off now, go and live in the forest together and have a nice and long life."

"We can have kits!" Honeypaw added with a dreamy sigh. Heat flushed up to my cheeks at this. Cloudtail snorted.

"And good luck with that!" He tipped his head and stalked off to the fresh-kill pile.

Hollypaw burst out laughing as soon as he'd gone. "Nice one Honeypaw! Nice one."

"Um, thank you?" I sighed. Obviously she didn't catch the sarcasm in the two cat's voices.

"I'd best be off." Stormpaw yawned and stood. "Better get some sleep before the big day tomorrow." As he passed Honeypaw, his tail caught her in the face. I turned away before anyone could talk to me anymore. I just wanted to sleep, and hide away from the outside world. It seemed as if I was causing more problems then I was solving.

I woke to sun blaring full on in my eyes. I sat up stiffly and blinked away the blackness on my vision, then arched my back in a long and luxurious stretch. Then I padded outside the den and sniffed the air. It was cold outside for new leaf, but I didn't mind. It woke me up.

Seeing Jayfeather by the entrance to his den, I called out to him. I reached him and saw he was sorting out multiple piles of herbs on the bare ground. "What's that?" I asked.

"Strength herbs," he replied stiffly. I could feel the medicine cat was tense, as if he was trying to push away the anxiety of the battle. Realizing I was just staring at him, I coughed awkwardly.

"What do you want?"

"Um, should I have some herbs?" Jayfeather turned his sightless gaze on me for an instant.

"Not if you want breakfast."

"I'm not hungry." Jayfeather sighed, as if giving up, and slid an herb pile over to me.

"They're not exactly the tastiest thing in the world, but it'll have to do. I don't have enough time to sweeten them with mouse blood." I couldn't tell if he actually had no time, or if he was playing with me. I grunted. I ate my strength herbs, very reluctantly at first, then watched as more cats lined up to receive their herbs.

Finally, when the sun had risen fully above the earth, Bramblstar started calling the patrol forward to get ready to move out. I turned to Jayfeather. "Bye Jayfeather."

He nodded to me. "Good luck, you're going to need it."

Chapter Fourteen

Thunder rolled over head as the patrol and I headed through the dense undergrowth of the early-morning forest. There would be a storm.

We passed straight through the ShadowClan scent markers without hesitation and continued on towards to what I thought was the ShadowClan camp. I had never been in it before, so this would be my first visit. As I thought over battle strategies and statistics, I realized something: why were we going into the heart of ShadowClan territory, because there are no trees at all to climb. Every single tree had branches way above the jumping height of even a SkyClan cat. The other cats seemed to see this, and we're peering around at the high branches and slippery trunks.

Only one cat voiced all their thoughts. "Why are we in ShadowClan territory if we haven't practiced here?" Sorreltail asked.

"It is the only way to stage a surprise attack, so it's a risk we'll have to take," Bramblestar meowed up from the front of the pack. "Now no more talking until we reach the camp; were almost there."

The patrol glided silently along the thin pine needles as they headed for the camp. The air crackled uncomfortably with tense feelings. The stink in the air was getting stronger by the heartbeat, when finally we broke away from the trees and revealed a shallow dip on the earth, as if a StarClan cat had scooped out a place for the camp.

Overlooking it, I saw a couple dens, the medicine cat den, I knew, because there was a cat lying on their side with herbs spread out across their flank. Probably from the battle. I smirked. I could make out the nursery in the dim light and also the warriors den. It was packed with sleeping and snoring cats, unsuspecting a large ThunderClan patrol was waiting for the right moment to ambush them. A shock wave of excitement rippled through me. I was going in a battle!

Stormpaw was wriggling beside me, also excited it seemed. Hollypaw to my right seemed - what was that in her eyes? Hunger? No sooner had I looked into her eyes then did they change to a neutral tone.

"Attack!"

I missed the call, I was distracted. I suddenly jerked up, realizing that most of the cats in my patrol had already began swarming down the hillside. I followed, slightly behind.

The first warrior screeched as he was tackled upon. That alerted the rest of the camp, and suddenly it was filled with terrified shrieks and yowls. Queens were shoving their kits into their bed of moss, hoping they wouldn't be seen by all he viscous warriors. To my surprise, Cederheart, a ShadowClan elder had sprang upon Birchfall and started attacking him. I was impressed. Luckily, the old elder didn't seem to be doing too much damage. Looking around once more, I spotted a pretty young ShadowClan she-cat cowering at the edge of the clearing. Warriors encircled her.

I shot a quick glance around the clearing, hoping to find an easier cat to fight. My muscles were a bit sore, so I wanted a practice round. My lips curled into a smile when my eyes found a small black tom looking around in a daze, as if he had just been woken up. Perfect.

I took one step when a massive weight crashed into my flank, shoving all the air out of my lungs. My body crashed to the ground, the heavy weight coming with me. I was staring up into green eyes, filled with delight. "Oh how nice it is to see you, Curlpaw." The cat spat the last word in my face. "I believe we haven't met before. I am Rowanstar." I shut my eyes, but the grinning face was still plastered to my eyelids. The weight vanished and I opened my eyes. He had gotten off. I scrambled to my feet, neck fur bristling and blood pumping at the thought of fighting this cat.

Rowanstar was huge. My ear tips barely reached his chin, and every time he moved, muscles rippled beneath his golden coat. "Let's see if you're a real warrior, shall we?" It took a moment to register this simple sentence, as I was almost in shock. Thoughts ran through my

head as I searched for an answer to reply with. I could run. No, he would catch me, and that wouldn't be what a real warrior would do. I realized what he meant. I could run, or I could stay and fight.

The answer was pretty obvious: I would fight him and beat him. I would show them I was not a little kit that could be played with all they wanted, and be tortured and thrown around. This would not go down like it did last time.

With a screech, I flung myself at him. I hit Rowanstar straight in the flank, but it wouldn't have been any more use then hitting stone. "Hahaha, you little kit," he spat at me. "You have no idea how weak and useless you are." I reeled back at these words. Even Blackstar wouldn't go this far. My vision started to blur, though I knew it wasn't from the light pitter patter of the beginning storm. He took a step towards me, and I started to back away, but realized that a steep wall was blocking my escape route. "You are nothing."

With a hefty paw, Rowanstar hit me in the head hard. I was thrown to the ground immediately, and stars filled my vision as I tried to see what was happening above my head. When my vision was clear, I looked up to see the big cat was on me, in the exactly the same place the last ShadowClan cat was. My heart thumped in my chest as I waited for the pain to come. But it never did.

I opened my eyes and realized that Rowanstar was tackling another cat. My father had come to my rescue at the last moment. I thanked StarClan.

I sprang to my paws, and looked around, hoping to find an easier opponent. The pretty she-cat I had seen earlier was now battering away at Honeypaw, and I realized that I had to help my Clanmate. I ran over, and tackled her, and the two of us rolled over and over, locked in tight combat of screeching voices, flailing paws, and flashing teeth.

Finally, I threw her off of me and I pinned her to the ground. The screeching behind me stopped, but I ignored it, to engaged to worry. "Don't ever think of ThunderClan as weak again," I growled fiercely in her face. The ShadowClan cat didn't reply. I didn't know if she even did think of us as weak, but it seemed rigt to say. The

she-cat's face was scrunched up in pain, and I could tell she was losing her grip on her pride. "Now go and run off, with the rest of your pitiful Clanmates." I released her, expecting to do what I told her to do, but instead she swung a paw at my legs, forcing me to collapse.

This time, it was me who was pinned. She was more violent then I thought she was actually going to be, and started to shred my ear. I howled in pain. My head was now throbbing from the pain of Rowanstar's blow, and now this. I pawed at her face weakly, trying to get her to stop, but it seemed to agrivate her more.

When she had finished with my ear that was ringing at the moment, she dealt a barrage of blows to my stomach and flank before rising a paw. I was barely conscious when two cats raced over and had to drag her off of me. I looked around, and through the blood, saw a circle of cats around me. I was confused, and thought I might be seeing things, but it loked so real. It seemed as if the whole battle had stopped and watched me and the she-cat fight.

Lifting my head was a huge difficulty, so I didn't even bother standing up. My head pulsed to the beat of my heart, along with several other wounds. Now I was sure I was going to pass out as I did last battle. I wanted to scream to the world I was so mad. It had turned out how it had last battle. I was a fail. I was never going to become a warrior.

I lay my head down and fell into darkness, hoping to escape all the difficulties of the world.

Chapter Fifteen ~Final~

A/N Nice job, reader! You have reached the last chapter of this book. Yes, I already have started on the next book, so please and go check it out! What am I planning for it, you ask? Well, first I want longer chapters. I feel like these chapters are getting a little too short, so that will be a definite. Secondly, the actual story will be longer, probably twenty or twenty five chapters long, not fifteen. And lastly, I am planning to put a little more effort into it, because I have finished a full book and feel like I need to make it better than the first somehow. This is going to be a series, actually, three books long. I hope you won't miss Curl too much when the series finishes. Anyways, I just wanted to thank ALL of you guys for voting and reading and commenting, it helps me SOO much. I wish you all good reading! Curl, out.
~Curl

I looked up. Nothing. Or was it nothing?

I was in a white . . . what do you even call it? A box? A room? It was nothing. But in the distance, a tiny fleck of silver glinted. I looked behind me to see if there was any others of them, and when I turned back, a cat was in front of me. I jumped.

"Hollypaw? Oh thank StarClan you're here! Where are we?" Her image seemed to flicker for a second. "Hollypaw?"

Her eyes trained onto mine, and suddenly, I felt my heart stop. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't see. I was choking. My legs buckled beneath me, and pain enveloped me. But when I opened my eyes again, what seemed only a second later, I was in a forest.

A dark forest.

I was getting scared by now. Everything seemed to be happening so fast. First I was in a battle . . . then I was in the white place, and now suddenly, I'm in a forest. What is happening to me? I got up,

determined to put an end to this dream thing. A thought occurred.

I padded around the thick foliage and underbrush as I looked for what I wanted. After some time, I found what I was searching for. A river flowed beyond me, though I wasn't so sure if it was actually a river. The water was black and sluggish and dirty. In fact, it didn't even look like water. I took a deep breath and was about to step in, intending to wake up from the dream by killing myself - surely it would work? - when a tail was laid on my shoulder.

I started and whipped my head aside to see a cat. She looked vaguely familiar, and her scent stirred something inside me. She had dark ginger fur and shining green eyes, reminding me of Firestar. It struck me. This was Squirrelflight, the cat who had been deputy before Lionblaze, the cat who had been killed in a border scuffle. I faintly remember her body lying in the middle of the clearing, my littermates and I being the first discoverers.

"Squirrelflight?"

Her eyes glinted sadly. "Curl - I mean Curlpaw, what are you doing here? You shouldn't be here yet." I opened my mouth to protest that I wasn't exactly happy to be here either when the she-cat shook her head. "Never mind that, we need to get you out of here before they find you."

I was tempted to find out who "they" were, but deep down I had a feeling of dread. This was the Dark Forest. I had figured that much out, at least. This was the place where your worst nightmares came to life, and innocent cats that had died in the Clans were being sent here. I shivered, hoping that when I die, someday, I won't have to go to this terrible place.

Squirrelflight led me around a grove of trees, past the sluggish river, and up a group of boulders to the edge of the forest. Beyond the treeline, or what looked like a treeline, was a forest. But this forest was the ThunderClan forest, with its bright green undergrowth, tall trees, and sweet crisp air. Relieved, I passed the line, expecting Squirrelflight to follow. When I looked back though, she was still standing at the border between the Dark Forest and ThunderClan territory.

"Come on," I told her. She gave a sad shake of her head and opened her mouth to say something when a dark black shadow ascended upon her back. Squirrelflight started to shiver and whimper in fear, and looked to the ground. I had a feeling she knew what was going to happen next.

But before it happened, she whimpered out the prophecy that destined me to save the clans. "Battles will rage, cats will die, but in the end, curled silence will-"

The shadow interrupted her. "Die."

***

My eyelids flew open. The dream was already fluttering away, as all dreams do, but the ominous re-written prophecy still lingered in the air. It still echoed through my head as I stood up and stretched, then looked around. I realized I was not in the apprentice den, I had slept in Jayfeather's den. I spotted dried blood on my pelt, covered with a layer of salve from Jayfeather's herbs and berries.

Now I recalled what had happened. The battle. The she-cat. The fight. I shivered at how strong she was for her size, nine or so moons I guessed. The nursery tales about ShadowClan's viciousness must be true then.

"Curlpaw!" I cocked my head over to where the excited meow had come from, to see Stormpaw and a lingering Hollypaw at the entrance to the cave. My brother rushed up to me and nuzzled my flank. "You've been asleep for two sunrises," he explained. "Our warrior ceremony is taking place at the half-moon, at least that is if you can take the assessment and pass. Bramblestar wasn't so sure that you would be up and going by then." I thought I detected Stormpaw's whiskers drop a little, presumably at the thought of me delaying the whole ceremony. Bramblestar would want all of us promoted as one.

I glanced at the waxing moon, and to my disappointment, found it a large crescent. The half-moon would be only a few sunrises away. A silence quieter than the early morning camp passed between us, before Stormpaw broke the tenuous silence. "It's okay, I don't want

you to re-open your wounds-"

"No, Stormpaw, no. I will train and I will not let my stupid injuries keep us from becoming warriors."

My brother's gray pelt turned to silver as the rays of the growing morning sun stretched across my home. The moon still floated in its place, forever taunting me of how much time I had left. Tediously, I stretched out my back leg, testing the strength in it. It protested a bit, but after two days of staying curled up in a ball, the air hitting it felt nice, and I felt I could run to RiverClan with the new strength pulsing through my veins.

Stormpaw left the cave with a farewell, leaving Hollypaw still hovering three tail-lengths away, scowling as usual. I had forgotten about her.

Slowly, I inched toward, before I stopped. This was my sister. Who did I think she was? It's not like she's going to hurt me. Or is she?

I shook the thoughts away and bounded to the silvery pelt, my muscles starting to throb again, and pressed my muzzle to her's. Instantly Hollypaw shrunk away, a glint of fear shining in her eyes. Quickly, I stole a few glances around the camp, then turned back to her. "What's your problem? I wake up from a possibly life-threatening sleep that I had been in for two days, and all you give me this?" I spat the last word in her face. Hollypaw let out a growl that rumbled deep in her throat. Before she could so on, I continued. "You used to be fun to play with when we were kits, but now all you ever do is skulk around the camp, hiding in the shadows. What have you been doing? I saw you almost murder Birchfall, all those moons ago. I see you sneak out of camp sometimes, when you think everyone is asleep. What happened to you?"

My sister opened her mouth as if she wanted to speak, but closed it again, her face remaining blank.

Anger stronger than I had ever felt before bubbled up inside me, threatening to blow. And then it did. "I don't even consider you family! You're not my sister you used to be, or will ever be.

StarClan sent me a dream long ago. I knew all along what you were doing to us." Tears welled up in my eyes, but I ignored them, not knowing if they were from anger or from what I knew. "I knew that the Dark Forest was sending cats that died, that deserved to go to StarClan, to the Dark Forest. Recruiting them. Training them. Torturing them until they were afraid of their own shadows. But the one thing I didn't know was who was leading them. Tigerstar was dead.

"But then one night, StarClan came to me. They sent me to a battlefield where all of the Clans as one Clan were charging toward the Dark Forest cats. They clashed and fought, but it was over in seconds. The Dark Forets cats had brutally murdered every single one of the Clan cats, down to the smallest kit. All of the Dark Forest cats survived, of course. But that wasn't the important message StarClan had in mind. They may destroy the Clans, but you know who was leading them into and out of the battle?" She didn't answer. "Do you?" Hollypaw stayed silent.

"It was you, Hollypaw. You were leading the Dark Forest cats to destroy the Clans. You are the new Tigerstar."

***

I could never look at my sister the same way. She continued to slink around the camp walls, unfazed by my knowledge that she was leader of the Dark Forest. How did that happen anyways? She was still an apprentice. The Dark Forest must have been as desperate as ShadowClan was when Nightstar became leader. A small fizz of pride spread throughout me, that my Clan had defeated the Dark Forest. But it quickly dissolved. We would have to beat them again if the Clans expected to last to future generations.

I hadn't decided yet if I should tell my mentor about Hollypaw. I highly doubted he would believe an apprentice. He thought that everyone was safe from the enemy, and had dispersed when the Clans had beaten it. He thought wrong.

If only I could convince him to taking a journey to the Moonpool. I had heard that StarClan visits leaders there in times of difficulties when the leader needed starry guidance, but Bramblestar didn't

think he needed it. That was the problem.

Finally, I had made a decsicion. I got to my paws and limped over to Highledge. Slowly, I dragged myself up the ledge to Bramblestar's den. It was sunhigh. The clearing was buzzing was activity and the dull hum of voices. It was so peaceful. If only I could be normal, and lift the burden of knowledge off my shoulders. I turned to Bramblestar's den and called to him.

"Come in, Curlpaw." I padded through the doorway, and was surprised to see Lionblaze and Jayfeather there. I looked at my leader's amber eyes, so relaxed. I told him everything about Hollypaw, and my dreams from StarClan, from Firestar coming to me to Squirrelflight saving me. In the end, his eyes had become ipa bit more determined now, but not surprised. I figured he had expected this. I asked if he believed me.

"Oh Curlpaw. I expect you think I don't believe you. I do, in fact. But you need not to worry, this is what you were born for. The Dark Forest will rise again, and we will defeat them again."

"Really?"

He sighed. "I cannot tell the future of the Clans, Curlpaw. But if we really are destined to go down, then we're not going down without a fight."